PRICE OF ADMIRALTY

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BY

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Or narrow if needs the house must be
Outside are the storms and strangers; we—
Oh! close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
—I and she!

Browning.

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PRICE OF ADMIRALTY

"O mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre!
Ce pays nous ennuie, O mort! Appareillons!"

I

Claire de Wissant, wife of Jacques de Wissant, Mayor of Falaise, stood in the morning sunlight, graceful with a proud, instinctive grace of poise and gesture, on a wind-blown path close to the edge of the cliff.

At some little distance to her left rose the sloping, mansard roofs of the Pavillon de Wissant, the charming country house to which her husband had brought her, a seventeen-year-old bride, ten long years ago.

She was now gazing eagerly out to sea, shielding her grey, heavy-lidded eyes with her right hand. From her left hand hung a steel chain, to which was attached a small key.

A hot haze lay heavily over the great sweep of deep blue waters. It blotted out the low grey line on the horizon which, on the majority of

each year's days, reminds the citizens of Falaise how near England is to France.

Jacques de Wissant had rejoiced in the *entente cordiale,* if only because it brought such a stream of tourists to the old seaport town of which he was now Mayor. But his beautiful wife thought of the English as gallant foes rather than as friends. Was she not great-granddaughter of that admiral who at Trafalgar, when both his legs were shattered by chain-shot, bade his men place him in a barrel of bran that he might go on commanding, in the hour of defeat, to the end?

And yet as Claire stood there, her eyes sweeping the sea for an as yet invisible craft, her heart seemed to beat rhythmically to the last verse of a noble English poem which the governess of her twin daughters had made them recite to her that very morning. How did it run? Aloud she murmured:—

> "Yet this inconstancy is such,
> As you too shall adore—"

and then she stopped, her quivering lips refusing to form the two concluding lines.

To Claire de Wissant, that moving cry from a man's soul was not dulled by familiarity, or hackneyed by common usage, and just now it found an intolerably faithful echo in her sad, rebellious heart, intensifying the anguish born of a secret and a very bitter renunciation.

With an abrupt, restless movement she turned and walked on till her way along the path was

barred by a curious obstacle. This was a small red-brick tower, built within a few feet of the edge of the cliff. It was an ugly blot on the beautiful stretch of down, all the uglier that the bricks and tiles had not yet had time to lose their hardness of line and colour in the salt wind.

On the cliff side, the small circular building, open to wind, sky, and sea, formed the unnatural apex of a natural stairway which led steeply, almost vertically, down to a deep land-locked cove below. The irregular steps carved by nature out of the chalk had been strengthened, and a rough protection added by means of knotted ropes fixed on either side of the dangerous descent.

In the days when these steps had started sheer from a cleft in the cliff path, Jacques de Wissant had never used this way of reaching a spot which till last year had been his property, and his favourite bathing-place; and he had also, in those same quiet days which now seemed so long ago, forbidden his little daughters to use that giddy, short cut to the shore. But his wife, Claire, was a fearless woman; and she had always preferred the dangerous, ladder-like stairs which seemed, when gazed at from below, to hang 'twixt sky and sea.

Now, however, she rarely availed herself of the right, retained by her obstinate husband, of using one of the two keys which unlocked the door set in the new brick tower, after the cove—

only by courtesy could it be called a bay—had been chosen, owing to its peculiar position, naturally remote and yet close to a great maritime port, to be the quarters of the Northern Submarine Flotilla.

Jacques de Wissant—and it was perhaps the only time in their joint life that his wife had entirely understood and sympathised with any action of her husband's—had refused the compensation his Government had offered him; more, in his cold, silent way, he had shown himself a patriot in a sense comparatively few modern men have the courage to be, namely, in that which affected both his personal comfort and his purse.

After standing for a moment on the perilously small and narrow platform which made the floor of the tower, Claire grasped firmly a strand of the knotted rope and began descending the long steps cut in the cliff side.

She no longer gazed out to sea, instead she looked straight down into the pale green, sun-flecked waters of the little bay, where seven out of the nine submarines which composed the flotilla were lying half-submerged, as is their wont in harbour.

A landsman, coming suddenly upon the cliff-locked pool, might have thought that the centuries had rolled back, and that the strange sight before him was a school of saurians lazily sun-

ning themselves in the placid waters of a sea inlet where time had stood still.

But no such vision came to Claire de Wissant. As she went down the cliff-side her lovely eyes rested on these sinister, man-created monsters with a feeling of sisterly, possessive affection. She had become so familiarly acquainted with each and all of them in the last few months; she knew with such a curious, intimate knowledge where they differed, both from each other and also from other submarine craft, not only here, in these familiar waters, but in the waters of France's great rival on the sea. . . .

It ever gave her a thrill of pride to remember that it was France which had first led the way in this, the most dangerous as also the most adventurous new arm of naval warfare: and she rejoiced as fiercely, as exultantly as any of her sea-fighting forbears would have done in the terrible potentialities of destruction which each of these strange, grotesque-looking craft bore in their narrow flanks.

It was now the hour of the crews' midday meal; there were fewer men standing about than usual; and so, after she had stepped down on the sandy strip of shore, and climbed the ladder leading to the old Napoleonic hulk which served as workshop and dwelling-place of the officers of the flotilla, Madame de Wissant for a few moments stood solitary, and looked musingly down into the waters of the bay.

Each submarine, its long, fish-like shape lying prone in the almost still, transparent water, differed not only in size, but in make, from its fellows, and no two conning towers even were alike.

Lying apart, as if sulking in a corner, was an example of the old "Gymnote" type of under-sea boat. She went by the name of the *Carp*, and she was very squat, small, and ugly, her telescopic conning tower being of hard canvas.

To Claire, the *Carp* always recalled an old Breton woman she had known as a girl. That woman had given thirteen sons to France, and of the thirteen five had died while serving with the colours—three at sea and two in Tonkin—and a grateful country had given her a pension of ten francs a week, two francs for each dead son.

Like that Breton woman, the ugly, sturdy little *Carp* had borne heroes in her womb, and like her, too, she had paid terrible toll of her sons to death.

Occasionally, but very seldom now, the *Carp* was taken out to sea, and the men, strange to say, liked being in her, for they regarded her as a lucky boat; she had never had what they called a serious accident.

Sunk deeper in the water was the broad-backed *Abeille*, significantly named "La Pétroleuse," the heroine of four explosions, no favourite with either crews or commanders; and, cradled in a

low dock on the farther strip of beach, was stretched the *Triton*, looking like a huge fish which has panted itself to death. The *Triton* also was not a lucky boat; she had been the theatre of a terrible mishap when, for some inexplicable cause, the conning tower had failed to close. Claire was always glad to see her safe in dock.

Out in the middle of the bay was *La Glorieuse*, a submarine of the then latest type. Had she not lain so low, little more than her flying bridge being above the water, she would have put her elder sisters to shame, so exquisitely shaped was she. Everything about *La Glorieuse* was made delicately true to scale, and she could carry a crew of over twenty men. But somehow Claire de Wissant did not care for this miniature leviathan, as she did for the older kind of submarine, and, with more reason for his prejudice, the officer in charge of the flotilla shared her feeling. Commander Dupré thought *La Glorieuse* difficult to handle under water. But he had had the same opinion of the *Neptune*, one of the two submarines which were out this fine August morning. . . .

An eager "Bonjour, madame," suddenly sounded in Claire de Wissant's ear, and she turned quickly to find one of the younger officers at her elbow.

"The *Neptune* is a few minutes late," he said, smiling. "I hope your sister has enjoyed her

cruise!" He was looking with admiring and grateful eyes at the young wife of the Mayor of Falaise, for Claire de Wissant and her widowed sister, Madeleine Baudoin, were very kind and hospitable to the officers of the submarine flotilla.

The life of both officers and men who volunteer for this branch of the service is grim and arduous. And if this is generally true of them all, it was specially so of those who served under Commander Dupré. By a tacit agreement with their chief, they took no part in the summer gaieties of the watering-place which has grown up round the old port of Falaise, and out of duty hours they would have led dull lives indeed had it not been for the hospitality shown them by the owners of the Pavillon de Wissant, and for the welcome which awaited them in the freer, gayer atmosphere of Madame Baudoin's villa, the Chalet des Dunes.

Madeleine Baudoin was a lively, cheerful woman, younger in nature if not in years than her beautiful sister, and so she was naturally more popular with the younger officers. They had felt especially flattered when Madame Baudoin had allowed herself to be persuaded to go out for a couple of hours in the *Neptune*; for till this morning neither of the sisters had ever ventured out to sea in a submarine.

And now 'twas true that the *Neptune* had been out longer than her commander had said she would be; but no touch of fear brushed Claire

de Wissant. She would have trusted what she held most precious in the world—her children—to Commander Dupré's care, and sure enough a few moments after her companion had spoken she suddenly saw the little tricolour, for which her keen eyes had for long swept the sea, bravely riding the waves, and making straight for the bay.

The flag moving swiftly over the surface of the blue water was a curious, almost an uncanny sight; one which never failed to fill Claire with a kind of spiritual exaltation. For the tiny strip of waving colour was a symbol of the gallantry, of the carelessness of danger, lying under the dancing, sun-flecked ripples which alone proved that the tricolour was not some illusion of sorcery.

And then, as if the submarine had been indeed a sentient, living thing, the *Neptune* lifted her great shield-like back up out of the sea and glided through the narrow neck of the bay, and so close under the long deck on which Madame de Wissant and her companion were standing.

The eager, busy hum of work slackened—discipline is not perhaps quite so taut in the French as it is in the British Navy—for both men and officers were one and all eager to see the lady who had ventured out in the *Neptune* with their commander. Only those actually on board had seen Madame Baudoin embark; there was a long, rough jetty close to her house, the

lonely Chalet des Dunes, and it was from there the submarine had picked up her honoured passenger.

But when Commander Dupré's stern, sunburnt face suddenly appeared above the conning tower, the men vanished as if by enchantment, while the eager, busy hum began again, much as if a lever, setting this human machinery in motion, had been touched by some titanic finger.

The officers naturally held their ground.

There was a look of strain in the Commander's blue eyes, and his mouth was set in hard lines; a thoughtful onlooker would have suspected that the exciting, dangerous life he led was trying his nerves. His men knew better; still, though they had no clue to the cause, they all knew he had changed greatly of late; to them individually he had become kinder, more human, and that naturally heightened their regret that he was now quitting the Northern Flotilla.

Commander Dupré had asked to be transferred to the Toulon Submarine Station; some experiments were being made there which he was anxious to watch. He was leaving Falaise on the morrow.

Claire de Wissant reddened, and a gleam leapt into her eyes as she met the naval officer's grave, measuring glance. But very soon he looked away from her, for now he was bending down, putting out a hand to help his late passenger to step up from the conning tower.

Smiling, breathless, a little dishevelled, her grey linen skirt crumpled, Madame Baudoin looked round her, dazed for the moment by the bright sunlight. Then she called out gaily :—

"Well, Claire! Here I am—alive and very, very hot!"

And as she jumped off the slippery flank of the *Neptune*, she gave herself and her crumpled gown a little shake, and made a slight, playful grimace.

The bright young faces round her broke into broad grins—those officers who volunteer for the submarine services of the world are chosen young, and they are merry boys.

"You may well laugh, messieurs,"—she threw them all a lively challenging glance—"when I tell you that to-day, for the first time in my life, I acknowledge masculine supremacy! I think that you will admit that we women are not afraid of pain? But the discomfort, the—the stuffiness? Ah, no—I could not have borne much longer the horrible discomfort and stuffiness of that dreadful little *Neptune* of yours!"

Protesting voices rose on every side. The *Neptune* was not uncomfortable! The *Neptune* was not stuffy!

"And I understand"—again she made a little grimace—"that it is quite an exceptional thing for the crew to be consoled, as I was to-day, by an ice-pail!"

"A most exceptional thing," said the youngest

lieutenant, with a sigh. His name was Paritot, and he also had been out with the *Neptune* that morning. "In fact, it only happens in that week which sees four Thursdays—or when we have a lady on board, madame!"

"What a pity it is," said another, "that the old woman who left a legacy to the inventor who devises a submarine life-saving apparatus didn't leave us instead a cream-ice allowance! It would have been a far more practical thing to do."

Madame Baudoin turned quickly to Commander Dupré, who now stood silent, smileless, at her sister's side.

"Surely you're going to try for this extra-ordinary prize?" she cried. "I'm sure that you could easily devise something which would gain the old lady's legacy."

"I, madame?" He answered with a start, almost as if he were wrenching himself free from some deep abstraction. "I should not think of trying to do such a thing! It would be a mere waste of time. Besides, there is no real risk—no risk that we are not prepared to run." He looked proudly round at the eager, laughing faces of the youngsters who were, till to-morrow night, still under his orders.

"The old lady meant very well," he went on, and for the first time since he had stepped out of the conning tower Commander Dupré smiled. "And I hope with all my heart that some poor

devil will get her money! But I think I may promise you that it will not be an officer in the submarine service. We are too busy, we have too many really important things to do, to worry ourselves about life-saving appliances. Why, the first thing we should do if pressed for room would be to throw our life-helmets overboard!"

"Has one of the life-helmets ever saved a life?"

It was Claire who asked the question in her low, vibrating voice.

Commander Dupré turned to her, and he flushed under his sunburn. It was the first time she had spoken to him that day.

"No, never," he answered shortly. And then, after a pause, he added, "the conditions in which these life-helmets could be utilised only occur in one accident in a thousand——"

"Still, they would have saved our comrades in the *Lutin*," objected Lieutenant Paritot.

The *Lutin?* There was a moment's silence. The evocation of that tricksy sprite, the Ariel of French mythology, whose name, by an ironical chance, had been borne by the most ill-fated of all submarine craft, seemed to bring the shadow of death athwart them all.

Madeleine Baudoin felt a sudden tremor of retrospective fear. She was glad she had not remembered the *Lutin* when she was sitting, eating ices, and exchanging frivolous, chaffing talk with Lieutenant Paritot in that chamber of

little ease, the drum-like interior of the *Neptune*, where not even she, a small woman, could stand upright.

"Well, well! We must not keep you from your *déjeuner!*" she cried, shaking off the queer, disturbing sensation. "I have to thank you for —shall I say a very interesting experience? I am far too honest to say an agreeable one!"

She shook hands with Commander Dupré and Lieutenant Paritot, the officers who had accompanied her on what had been, now that she looked back on it, perhaps a more perilous adventure than she had realised.

"You're coming with me, Claire?" She looked at her sister—it was a tender, anxious, loving look; Madeleine Baudoin had been the eldest, and Claire de Wissant the youngest, of a Breton admiral's family of three daughters and four sons; they two were devoted to one another.

Claire shook her head. "I came to tell you that I can't lunch with you to-day," she said slowly. "I promised I would be back by half-past twelve."

"Then we shall not meet till to-morrow?"

Claire repeated mechanically, "No, not till to-morrow, dear Madeleine."

"May I row you home, madame?" Lieutenant Paritot asked Madeleine eagerly.

"Certainly, *mon ami*."

And so, a very few minutes later, Claire de

Wissant and Commander Dupré were left alone together—alone, that is, save for fifty inquisitive, if kindly, pairs of eyes which saw them from every part of the bay.

At last she held out her hand. "Good-bye, then, till to-morrow," she said, her voice so low as to be almost inaudible.

"No, not good-bye yet!" he cried imperiously. "You must let me take you up the cliff to-day. It may be—I suppose it is—the last time I shall be able to do so."

Hardly waiting for her murmured word of assent, he led the way to, and up the steep, ladder-like stairway cut in the cliff side. Halfway up there were some very long steps, and it was from above that help could best be given so it was he who naturally went first. He longed with a fierce, aching longing that she would allow him to take her two hands in his and draw her up those high, precipitous steps. But of late Claire had avoided accepting from him, her friend, this simple, trifling act of courtesy. And now twice he had turned and held out his right hand, and twice she had pretended not to see it.

At last, within ten feet of the top of the cliff, they came to the steepest, rudest step of all—a place some might have thought really dangerous.

Commander Dupré bent down and looked into Claire's uplifted face. "Let me at least help

you up here," he said hoarsely. Once more he held out his hand.

She shook her head obstinately—but suddenly he felt her soft tremulous lips touch his lean, sinewy hand, and her hot tears fall upon his fingers.

He gave a strangled cry of pain and of pride, of agony and of rapture, and for a long moment he battled with an awful temptation. How easy it would be to gather her into his arms, and, with her face hidden on his breast, take a great leap backwards, into nothingness. . . .

But he conquered the persuasive devil who had been raised—women do not know how easy it is to raise this devil—by Claire's moment of piteous self-revelation.

A moment later they stood, together, on the narrow platform where she, less than an hour ago, had stood alone.

Sheltered by the friendly, ugly red walls of the little tower, the two were as remote from their kind as if on a rock in the midst of the sea. More, she was in his power in a sense she had never been, for she had at last herself broken down the fragile barrier with which she had hitherto known how to keep him at bay. But he felt rather than saw that it was herself she would despise if now, at the twelfth hour, he took advantage of that tremulous kiss of renunciation, of those hot tears of anguished parting

—and so—"Then at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning?" he said, and he felt as if it was some other man, not he himself, who was saying the words.

He took her hand in farewell—so much he could allow himself—and all unknowingly he crushed her fingers in his strong, convulsive grasp.

"Yes," she said, "at eleven to-morrow morning Madeleine and I will be waiting, out on the end of the jetty."

He thought he detected a certain hesitancy in her voice.

"Are you sure you still wish to come?" he said gravely. "I would not wish you to do anything that would cause you any fear—or any discomfort. Your sister evidently found it a very trying experience to-day——"

Claire smiled. Her hand no longer hurt her; her fingers had become quite numb.

"Afraid?" she said, and there was a little scorn in her voice. And then, "Ah, me! I only wish that there were far more risk than there is about that which we are going to do together to-morrow." She was in a dangerous mood, poor soul—the mood that raises a devil, not only in men, but in women too. Perhaps her good angel came to help her, for suddenly, "Forgive me," she said humbly. "You know I did not mean that! Only cowards wish for death."

And then, looking at him, she averted her

eyes, for they showed her that, if that were so, Dupré was indeed a craven.

"*Au revoir*," she whispered; "*au revoir* till to-morrow morning."

When half-way through the door, leading on to the lonely stretch of down, she turned round suddenly. "I do not want you to bring any ices for me to-morrow."

"I never thought of doing so," he said simply. And the words pleased Claire as much as anything just then could pleasure her, for they proved that her friend did not class her in his mind with those women who fear discomfort more than danger.

It had been her own wish to go out with Commander Dupré for his last cruise in northern waters. She had not had the courage to deny herself this final glimpse of him—they were never to meet again after to-morrow—in his daily habit as he lived.

II

At nine o'clock the next morning Jacques de Wissant stood in his wife's boudoir.

It was a strange and beautiful room, likely to linger in the memory of those who knew its strange and beautiful mistress.

The walls were draped with old Persian shawls, the furniture was of red Chinese lacquer, a set acquired in the East by some Norman sailing man unnumbered years ago, and bought

by Claire de Wissant out of her own slender income not long after her marriage.

Pale blue and faded yellow silk cushions softened the formal angularity of the wide cane-seated couch and low, square chairs. There was a deep crystal bowl of midsummer flowering roses on the table, laden with books, by which Claire often sat long hours reading poetry and volumes written by modern poets and authors of whom her husband had only vaguely heard and of whom he definitely disapproved.

The window was wide open, and there floated in from the garden, which sloped away to the edge and indeed over the crumbling cliff, fragrant, salt-laden odours, dominated by the clean, sharp scent thrown from huge shrubs of red and white geraniums. The balls of blossom set against the belt of blue sea formed a band of waving tricolour.

But Jacques de Wissant was unconscious, uncaring of the beauty round him, either in the room or without, and when at last he walked forward to the window, his face hardened as his eyes instinctively sought out the spot where, if hidden from his sight, he knew there lay the deep transparent waters of the little bay which had been selected as providing ideal quarters for the submarine flotilla.

He had eagerly assented to the sacrifice of his land, and, what meant far more to him, of his privacy; but now he would have given

much—and he was a careful man—to have had the submarine station swept away, transferred to the other side of the town of Falaise.

Down there, out of sight of the Pavillon, and yet but a few minutes away (if one used the dangerous cliff-stairway), dwelt Jacques de Wissant's secret foe: for the man of whom he was acutely, miserably jealous was Commander Dupré, of whose coming departure he as yet knew nothing.

The owner of the Pavillon de Wissant seldom entered the room where he now stood impatiently waiting for his wife, and he never did so without looking round him with distaste, and remembering with an odd, wistful feeling what it had been like in his mother's time. Then "le boudoir de madame" had reflected the tastes and simple interests of an old-fashioned, provincial lady born in the year that Louis Philippe came to the throne.

Greatly did the man now standing there prefer the room as it had been to what it was now!

The heavy, ugly furniture which had been there in the days of his lonely youth, for he had been an only child, was now in the school-room where the twin daughters of the house, Clairette and Jacqueline, did their lessons with Miss Doughty, their English governess.

Clairette and Jacqueline? Jacques de Wissant's lantern-jawed, expressionless face quickened into feeling as he thought of his two little

girls. They were the pride, as well as the only vivid pleasure, of his life. All that he dispassionately admired in his wife was, so he sometimes told himself with satisfaction, repeated in his daughters. Clairette and Jacqueline had inherited their mother's look of race, her fastidiousness and refinement of bearing, while fortunately lacking Claire's dangerous personal beauty, her touch of eccentricity, and her discontent with life —or rather with the life which Jacques de Wissant, in spite of a gnawing ache and longing that nothing could still or assuage, yet found good.

The Mayor of Falaise looked strangely out of keeping with his present surroundings, at least so he would have seemed to the eye of any foreigner, especially of any Englishman, who had seen him standing there.

He was a narrowly built man, forty-three years of age, and his clean-shaven, rather fleshy face was very pale. On this hot August morning he was dressed in a light grey frock-coat, under which he wore a yellow waistcoat, and on his wife's writing-table lay his tall hat and lemon-coloured gloves.

As mayor of his native town—a position he owed to an historic name and to his wealth, and not to his very moderate Republican opinions—his duties included the celebration of civil marriages, and to-day, it being the 14th of August, the eve of the Assumption, and still a French

national fête, there were to be a great many weddings celebrated in the Hôtel de Ville.

Jacques de Wissant considered that he owed it to himself, as well as to his fellow-citizens, to appear "correctly" attired on such occasions. He had a deep, wordless contempt for those of his acquaintances who dressed on ceremonial occasions "à l'anglaise," that is, in loose lounge suits and straw hats.

Suddenly there broke on his ear the sound of a low, full voice, singing. It came from the next room, his wife's bedroom, and the mournful passionate words of an old sea ballad rang out, full of a desolate pain and sense of bitter loss.

The sound irritated him shrewdly, and there came back to him a fragment of conversation he had not thought of for ten years. During a discussion held between his father and mother in this very room about their adored only son's proposed marriage with Claire de Kergouët, his father had said: "There is one thing I do not much care for; she is, they say, very musical, and Jacques, even as a baby, howled like a dog whenever he heard singing!" And his mother had laughed, "*Mon ami,* you cannot expect to get perfection, even for our Jacques!" And Claire, so he now admitted unwillingly to himself, had never troubled him overmuch with her love of music. . . .

He knocked twice, sharply, on his wife's door.

The song broke short with an almost cruel suddenness, and yet there followed a perceptible pause before he heard her say, "Come in."

And then, as Jacques de Wissant slowly turned the handle of the door, he saw his wife, Claire, before she saw him. He had a vision, that is, of her as she appeared when she believed herself to be, if not alone, then in sight of eyes that were indifferent, unwatchful. But Jacques' eyes, which his wife's widowed sister, the frivolous Parisienne, Madeleine Baudoin, had once unkindly compared to fishes' eyes, were now filled with a watchful, suspicious light which gave a tragic mask to his pallid, plain-featured face.

Claire de Wissant was standing before a long, narrow mirror placed at right angles to a window looking straight out to sea. Her short, narrow, dark blue skirt and long blue silk jersey silhouetted her slender figure, the figure which remained so supple, so—so girlish, in spite of her nine-year-old daughters. There was something shy and wild, untamed and yet beckoning, in the oval face now drawn with pain and sleeplessness, in the grey, almond-shaped eyes reddened with secret tears, and in the firm, delicately modelled mouth.

She was engaged in tucking up her dark, curling hair under a grey yachting cap, and, for a few moments, she neither spoke nor looked round to see who was standing framed in the door. But when, at last, she turned away from the

mirror and saw her husband, the colour, rushing into her pale face, caused an unbecoming flush to cover it.

"I thought it was one of the children," she said, a little breathlessly. And then she waited, assuming, or so Jacques thought, an air at once of patience and of surprise which sharply angered him.

Then her look of strain, nay, of positive illness, gave him an uneasy twinge of discomfort. Could it be anxiety concerning her second sister, Marie-Anne, who, married to an Italian officer, was now ill of scarlet fever at Mantua?

Two days ago Claire had begged very earnestly to be allowed to go and nurse Marie-Anne. But he, Jacques, had refused, not unkindly, but quite firmly. Claire's duty, of course, lay at Falaise, with her husband and children; not at Mantua, with a married sister.

Suddenly she again broke silence. "Well?" she said. "Is there anything you wish to tell me?" They had never used the familiar "thee" and "thou" the one to the other, for at the time of their marriage an absurd whim of fashion had ordained on the part of French wives and husbands a return to eighteenth-century formality, and Claire had chosen, in that one instance, to follow fashion.

She added, seeing that he still did not speak, "I am lunching with my sister to-day, but I shall be home by three o'clock." She spoke with the

chill civility a lady shows a stranger. Claire seldom allowed herself to be on the defensive when speaking to her husband.

Jacques de Wissant frowned. He did not like either of his wife's sisters, neither the one who was now lying ill in Italy, nor his widowed sister-in-law, Madeleine Baudoin. In the villa which she had hired for the summer, and which stood on a lonely stretch of beach beyond the bay, Madeleine often entertained the officers of the submarine flotilla, and this, from her brother-in-law's point of view, was very far from "correct" conduct on the part of one who could still pass as a young widow.

In response to his frown there had come a slight, mocking smile on Claire's face.

"I suppose you are on your way to some important town function?"

She disliked the town of Falaise, the townfolk bored her, and she hated the vast old family house in the Market Place, where she had to spend each winter.

"To-day is the fourteenth of August," observed Jacques de Wissant in his deliberate voice; "and I have a great many marriages to celebrate this morning."

"Yes, I suppose that is so." And again Claire de Wissant spoke with the courteous indifference, the lack of interest in her husband's concerns, which she had early schooled him to endure.

But all at once there came a change in her

voice, in her manner. "Why to-day—the fourteenth of August—is our wedding day! How stupid of me to forget! We must tell Jacqueline and Clairette. It will amuse them——"

She uttered the words a little breathlessly, and as she spoke, Jacques de Wissant walked quickly forward into the room. As he did so his wife moved abruptly away from where she had been standing, thus maintaining the distance between them.

But Claire de Wissant need not have been afraid; her husband had his own strict code of manners, and to this code he ever remained faithful. He possessed a remarkable mastery of his emotions, and he had always showed with regard to herself so singular a power of self-restraint that Claire, not unreasonably, doubted if he had any emotions to master, any passionate feeling to restrain.

All he now did was to take a shagreen case out of his breast pocket and hold it out towards her.

"Claire," he said quietly, "I have brought you, in memory of our wedding day, a little gift which I hope you will like. It is a medallion of the children." And as she at last advanced towards him, he pressed a spring, and revealed a dull gold medal on which, modelled in high relief, and superposed the one on the other, were Clairette's and Jacqueline's childish, delicately pure profiles.

A softer, kindlier light came into Claire de

Wissant's sad grey eyes. She held out a hesitating hand—and Jacques de Wissant, before placing his gift in it, took that soft hand in his, and, bending rather awkwardly, kissed it lightly. In France, even now, a man will often kiss a woman's hand by way of conventional, respectful homage. But to Claire the touch of her husband's lips was hateful—so hateful indeed that she had to make an instant effort to hide the feeling of physical repulsion with which that touch had suddenly engulfed her in certain dark recesses of memory and revolt.

"It is a charming medallion," she said hurriedly, "quite a work of art, Jacques; and I thank you for having thought of it. It gives me great—very great pleasure."

And then something happened which was to her so utterly unexpected that she gave a stifled cry of pain—almost it seemed of fear.

As she forced herself to look straight into her husband's face, the anguish in her own sore heart unlocked the key to his, and she perceived with the eyes of the soul, which see, when they are not holden, so much that is concealed from the eyes of the body, the suffering, the dumb longing she had never allowed herself to know were there.

For the first time since her marriage—since that wedding day of which this was the tenth anniversary—Claire felt pity for Jacques as well as for herself. For the first time her rebellious

heart acknowledged that her husband also was enmeshed in a web of tragic circumstance.

"Jacques?" she cried. "Oh, Jacques!" And as she so uttered his name twice, there came a look of acute distress and then of sudden resolution on her face. "I wish you to know," she exclaimed, "that—that—if I were a wicked woman I should perhaps be to you a better wife!" Thanks to the language in which she spoke; there was a play on the word—that word which in French signifies woman as well as wife.

He stared at her, and uttered no word of answer, of understanding, in response to her strange speech.

At one time, not lately, but many years ago, Claire had sometimes tried his patience by the odd, unreasonable things she said, and once, stung beyond bearing, he had told her so. Remembering those cold, measured words of rebuke, she now caught with quick, exultant relief at the idea that Jacques had not understood the half-confession wrung from her by her sudden vision of his pain; and she swung back to a belief she had always held till just now, the belief that he was dull—dull and unperceptive.

With a nervous smile she turned again to her mirror, and then Jacques de Wissant, with his wife's enigmatic words ringing in his ears, abruptly left the room.

As if pursued by some baneful presence, he hastened through Claire's beautiful boudoir, across the dining-room hung with the Gobelins tapestries which his wife had brought him as part of her slender dower, and so into the oval hall which formed the centre of the house.

And there Jacques de Wissant waited for a while, trying to still and to co-ordinate his troubled thoughts and impressions.

Ah yes, he had understood—understood only too well Claire's strange, ambiguous utterance! There are subtle, unbreathed temptations which all men and all women, when tortured by jealousy, not only understand, but divine before they are actually in being.

Jacques de Wissant now believed that he was justified of the suspicions of which he had been ashamed. His wife—moved by some obscure desire for self-revelation to which he had had no clue—had flung at him the truth.

Yes, without doubt Claire could have made him happy—so little would have contented his hunger for her—had she been one of those light women of whom he sometimes heard, who go from their husbands' kisses to those of their lovers.

But if he sometimes, nay, often heard of them, Jacques de Wissant knew nothing of such women. The men of his race had known how to acquire honest wives, aye, and keep them so. There had never been in the de Wissant family

any of those ugly scandals which stain other clans, and which are remembered over generations in French provincial towns. Those scandals which, if they provoke a laugh and a cruel sneer when discussed by the indifferent, are recalled with long faces and anxious whisperings when a young girl's future is being discussed, and which make the honourable marriage of daughters difficult of achievement.

Jacques de Wissant thanked the God of his fathers that Claire had nothing in common with such women as those: he thought he did not need her assurance to know that his honour, in the usual, narrow sense of the phrase, was safe in her hands, but still her strange, imprudent words of half-avowal racked him with jealous and, yes, suspicious pain.

Fortunately for him, he was a man burdened with much business, and so at last he looked at his watch. Why, it was getting late—terribly late, and he prided himself on his punctuality. Still, if he started now, at once, he would be at the Hôtel de Ville a few minutes before ten o'clock, the hour when the first of the civil marriages he had to celebrate that morning was timed to take place.

Without passing through the house, he made his way rapidly round by the gardens to the road, winding ribbon-wise behind the cliffs, where his phaeton was waiting for him; for

Jacques de Wissant had as yet resisted the wish of his wife and the advice of those of his friends who considered that he ought to purchase an automobile: driving had been from boyhood one of his few pleasures and accomplishments.

But as he drove, keeping his fine black bays well in hand, the five miles into the town, and though he tried to fix his mind on a commercial problem of great importance with which he would be expected to deal that day, Jacques de Wissant found it impossible to think of any matter but that which for the moment filled his heart to the exclusion of all else.

That matter concerned his own relations to his wife, and his wife's relations to Commander Dupré.

This gentleman of France was typical in more than one sense of his nation and of his class—quite unlike, that is, to the fancy picture which foreigners draw of the average Frenchman. Reserved and cold in manner; proud, with an intense but never openly expressed pride in his name, and of what the bearers of it had achieved for their country; obstinate and narrow as are apt to be all human beings whose judgment is never questioned by those about them, Jacques de Wissant's fetish was his personal honour and the honour of his name.

In his distress and disturbance of mind—for his wife's half confession had outraged his sense of what was decorous and fitting—his memory

travelled over the map of his past life, aye, and even beyond the boundaries of his own life.

Before him lay spread retrospectively the story of his parents' uneventful, happy marriage. They had been mated in the good old French way, that is, up to their wedding morning they had never met save in the presence of their respective parents. And yet—and yet how devoted they had been to each other! So completely one in thought, in interest, in sympathy had they grown that when, after thirty-three years of married life, his father had died, Jacques' mother had not known how to go on living. She had slipped out of life a few months later, and as she lay dying she had used a very curious expression: "My faithful companion is calling me," she had said to her only child, "and you must not try, dear son, to make me linger on the way."

Now, to-day, Jacques de Wissant asked himself with perplexed pain and anger, why it was that his parents had led so peaceful, so dignified, so wholly contented a married life, while he himself——?

And yet his own marriage had been a love match—or so those about him had all said with nods and smiles—love marriages having suddenly become the fashion in the rich provincial world of which he had then been one of the heirs-apparent.

His old-fashioned mother would have preferred

as daughter-in-law any one of half a dozen girls who belonged to her own good town of Falaise, and whom she had known from childhood. But Jacques had been difficult to please, and he was already thirty-two when he had met, by a mere chance, Claire de Kergouët at her first ball. She was only seventeen, with but the promise of a beauty which was now in exquisite flower, and he had decided, there and then, in the course of two hours, that this demoiselle de Kergouët was alone worthy of becoming Madame Jacques de Wissant.

And on the whole his prudent parents had blessed his choice, for the girl was of the best Breton stock, and came of a family famed in the naval annals of France. Unluckily Claire de Kergouët had had no dowry to speak of, for her father, the Admiral, had been a spendthrift, and, as is still the reckless Breton fashion, father of a large family—three daughters and four sons. But Jacques de Wissant had not allowed his parents to give the matter of Claire's fortune more than a regretful thought—indeed, he had done further, he had "recognised" a larger dowry than she brought him to save the pride of her family.

But Claire—he could not help thinking of it to-day with a sense of bitter injury—had never seemed grateful, had never seemed to understand all that had been done for her. . . .

Had he not poured splendid gifts upon her

in the beginning of their married life? And, what had been far more difficult, had he not, within reason, contented all her strange whims and fantasies?

But nought had availed him to secure even a semblance of that steadfast, warm affection, that sincere interest and pride in his concerns which is all such a Frenchman as was Jacques de Wissant expects, or indeed desires, of his wedded wife. Had Claire been such a woman, Jacques' own passion for her would soon have dulled into a reasonable, comfortable affection. But his wife's cool aloofness had kept alive the hidden fires, the more—so ironic are the tricks which sly Dame Nature plays—that for many years past he had troubled her but very little with his company.

Outwardly Claire de Wissant did her duty, entertaining his friends and relations on such occasions as was incumbent on her, and showing herself a devoted and careful mother to the twin daughters who formed the only vital link between her husband and herself. But inwardly? Inwardly they two were strangers.

And yet only during the last few months had Jacques de Wissant ever felt jealous of his wife. True, there had been times when he had been angered by the way in which her young beauty, her indefinable, mysterious charm, had attracted the very few men with whom she was brought into contact. But Claire, so her husband had

always acknowledged to himself, was no flirt; she was ever perfectly "correct."

Correct was a word dear to Jacques de Wissant's soul. It was one which he used as a synonym for great things—things such as honour, fineness of conduct, loyalty.

But suddenly fate had introduced a stranger into the dull, decorous life of the Pavillon de Wissant, and it was he, Jacques himself, who had brought him there.

How bitter it was to look back and remember how much he had liked—liked because he had respected—Commander Dupré! He now hated and feared the naval officer, and he would have given much to have been able to despise him. But that Jacques de Wissant could not do. Commander Dupré was still all that he had taken him to be when he first made him free of his house—a brilliant officer, devoted to his profession, already noted in the Service as having made several important improvements in submarine craft.

From the first it had seemed peculiar, to Jacques de Wissant's mind unnatural, that such a man as was Dupré should be so keenly interested in music and in modern literature. But so it was, and it had been owing to their possessing in common these strange, untoward tastes, that Commander Dupré and Claire had become friends.

He now reminded himself, for the hundredth

time, that he had begun by actually approving of the acquaintance between his wife and the naval officer—an acquaintance which he had naturally supposed would be of the most "correct" nature.

Then, without warning, there came an hour—nay, a moment, when in that twilight hour which the French call "'Twixt dog and wolf," the most torturing and shameful of human passions, jealousy, had taken possession of Jacques de Wissant, disintegrating, rather than shattering, the elaborate fabric of his House of Life, that dwelling in which he had always dwelt so snugly and unquestioningly ensconced.

He had come home after a long afternoon spent at the Hôtel de Ville to learn with tepid pleasure that there was a visitor, Commander Dupré, in the house, and as he had come hurrying towards his wife's boudoir, Jacques had heard Claire's low, deep voice and the other's ardent, eager tones mingling together. . . .

And then as he, the husband, had opened the door, they had stopped speaking, their words clipped as if a sword had fallen between them. At the same moment a servant had brought a lamp into the twilit room, and Jacques had seen the ravaged face of Commander Dupré, a fair, tanned face full of revolt and of longing leashed. Claire had remained in shadow, but her eyes, or so the interloper thought he perceived, were full of tears.

Since that spring evening the Mayor of Falaise had not had an easy moment. While scorning to act the spy upon his wife, he was for ever watching her, and keeping an eager and yet scarcely conscious count of her movements.

True, Commander Dupré had soon ceased to trouble the owner of the Pavillon de Wissant by his presence. The younger officers came and went, but since that hour, laden with unspoken drama, their commander only came when good breeding required him to pay a formal call on his nearest neighbour and sometime host. But Claire saw Dupré constantly at the Chalet des Dunes, her sister's house, and she was both too proud, and too indifferent, or so it appeared, to her husband's view of what a young married woman's conduct should be, to conceal the fact.

This openness on his wife's part was at once Jacques' consolation, and his opportunity for endless self-torture.

For three long miserable months he had wrestled with those ignoble questionings only the jealous know, now accepting as probable, now rejecting with angry self-rebuke, the thought that his wife suffered, perhaps even returned, Dupré's love. And to-day, instead of finding his jealousy allayed by her half-confidence, he felt more wretched than he had ever been.

His horses responded to his mood, and going down the steep hill which leads into the town of Falaise they shied violently at a heap of stones

they had passed sedately a hundred times or more. Jacques de Wissant struck them several cruel blows with the whip he scarcely ever used, and the groom, looking furtively at his master's set face and blazing eyes, felt suddenly afraid.

III

It was one o'clock, and the last of the wedding parties had swept gaily out of the great *salle* of the Falaise town hall and so to the Cathedral across the market place.

Jacques de Wissant, with a feeling of pleasant relief, took off his tricolour badge of office. And then, with the instinctive love of order which was characteristic of the man, he gathered up the papers that were spread on the large table and placed them in neat piles before him.

Through the high windows, which by his orders had been prised open, for it was intensely hot, he could hear what seemed an unwonted stir outside. The picturesque town was full of strangers; in addition to the usual holiday-makers from the neighbourhood, crowds of Parisians had come down to spend the Feast of the Assumption by the sea.

The Mayor of Falaise liked to hear this unwonted stir and movement, for everything that affected the prosperity of the town affected him very nearly; but he was constitutionally averse

to noise, and just now he felt very tired. The varied emotions which had racked him that morning had drained him of his vitality; and he thought with relief that in a few moments he would be in the old-fashioned restaurant just across the market place, where a table was always reserved for him when his town house happened to be shut up, and where all his tastes and dietetic fads—for M. de Wissant had a delicate digestion—were known.

He took up his tall hat and his lemon-coloured gloves—and then a look of annoyance came over his weary face, for he had heard the distant swinging of a door. Evidently his clerk was coming back to ask some stupid question.

He always found it difficult to leave the town hall at the exact moment he wished to do so; for although the officials dreaded his cold reprimands, they were far more afraid of his sudden hot anger if business of any importance were done without his knowledge and sanction.

But this time it was not his clerk who wished to intercept the mayor on his way out to *déjeuner*; it was the chief of the employés in the telephone and telegraph department of the building, a forward, pushing young man whom Jacques de Wissant disliked.

"M'sieur le Maire?" and then he stopped short, daunted by the other's stern look of impatient fatigue. "Has M'sieur le Maire heard the news?" The speaker gathered up courage;

it is exciting to be the bearer of news, especially of ill news.

M. de Wissant shook his head.

"Alas! there has been an accident. A terrible accident! One of the submarines—they don't yet know which it is—has been struck by a big private yacht and has sunk in the fairway of the Channel, about two miles out!"

The Mayor of Falaise uttered an involuntary exclamation of horror. "When did it happen?" he asked quickly.

"About half an hour ago more or less. *I* said that M'sieur le Maire ought to be informed at once of such a calamity. But I was told to wait till the marriages were over."

Looking furtively at the Mayor's pale face, the young man regretted that he had not taken more on himself, for Monsieur de Wissant looked seriously displeased.

There was an old feud between the municipal and the naval authorities of Falaise—there often is in a naval port—and the Mayor ought certainly to have been among the very first to hear the news of the disaster.

The bearer of ill news hoped M'sieur le Maire would not blame him for the delay, or cause the fact to postpone his advancement to a higher grade—that advancement which is the perpetual dream of every French Government official.

"The admiral has only just driven by," he

observed insinuatingly, "not five minutes ago——"

But still Jacques de Wissant did not move. He was listening to the increasing stir and tumult going on outside in the market place. The sounds had acquired a sinister significance; he knew now that the tramping of feet, the loud murmur of voices, meant that the whole population belonging to the seafaring portion of the town was emptying itself out, and hurrying towards the harbour and the shore.

Shaking off the bearer of ill news with a curt word of thanks, the Mayor of Falaise strode out of the town hall into the street and joined the eager crowd, mostly consisting of fisher folk, which grew denser as it swept down the tortuous narrow streets leading to the sea.

The people parted with a sort of rough respect to make way for their mayor; many of them, nay the majority, were known by name to Jacques de Wissant, and the older men and women among them could remember him as a child.

Rising to the tragic occasion, he walked forward with his head held high, and a look of deep concern on his pale, set face. The men who manned the Northern Submarine Flotilla were almost all men born and bred at Falaise—Falaise famed for the gallant sailors she has ever given to France.

The hurrying crowd—strangely silent in its

haste—poured out on to the great stone-paved quays in which is set the harbour so finely encircled on two sides by the cliffs which give the town its name.

Beyond the harbour—crowded with shipping, and now alive with eager little craft and fishing-boats making ready to start for the scene of the calamity—lay a vast expanse of glistening sea, and on that sun-flecked blue pall every eye was fixed.

The end of the harbour jetty was already roped off, only those officially privileged being allowed through to the platform where now stood Admiral de Saint Vilquier impatiently waiting for the tug which was to take him out to the spot where the disaster had taken place.

The Admiral was a naval officer of the old school—of the school who called their men "my children"—and who detested the Republican form of government as being subversive of discipline.

As Jacques de Wissant hurried up to him, he turned and stiffly saluted the Mayor of Falaise. Admiral de Saint Vilquier had no liking for M. de Wissant—a cold prig of a fellow, and yet married to such a beautiful, such a charming young woman, the daughter, too, of one of the Admiral's oldest friends, of that Admiral de Kergouët with whom he had first gone to sea a matter of fifty years ago! The lovely Claire de Kergouët had been worthy of a better fate than

to be wife to this plain, cold-blooded landsman.

"Do they yet know, Admiral, which of the submarines has gone down?" asked Jacques de Wissant in a low tone.

He was full of a burning curiosity, edged with a longing and a suspense into whose secret sources he had no wish to thrust a probe.

The Admiral's weather-beaten face was a shade less red than usual; the bright blue eyes he turned on the younger man were veiled with a film of moisture. "Yes, the news has just come in, but it isn't to be made public for awhile. It's the submarine *Neptune* which was struck, with Commander Dupré, Lieutenant Paritot, and ten men on board. The craft is lying eighteen fathoms deep——"

Jacques de Wissant uttered an inarticulate cry —was it of horror or only of surprise? And yet, gifted for that once, and that once only, with a kind of second sight, he had *known* that it was the *Neptune* and Commander Dupré which lay eighteen fathoms deep on the floor of the sea.

The old seaman, moved by the mayor's emotion, relaxed into a confidential undertone. "Poor Dupré! I had forgotten that you knew him. He is indeed pursued by a malignant fate. As of course you are aware, he applied a short time ago to be transferred to Toulon, and his appointment is in to-day's *Gazette*. In fact he

was actually leaving Falaise this very evening in order to spend a week with his family before taking up his new command!"

The Mayor of Falaise stared at the Admiral. "Dupré going away?—leaving Falaise?" he repeated incredulously.

The other nodded.

Jacques de Wissant drew a long, deep breath. God! How mistaken he had been! Mistaken as no man, no husband, had ever been mistaken before. He felt overwhelmed, shaken with conflicting emotions in which shame and intense relief predominated.

The fact that Commander Dupré had applied for promotion was to his mind absolute proof that there had been nothing—nothing and less than nothing—between the naval officer and Claire.

The Admiral's words now made it clear that he, Jacques de Wissant, had built up a huge superstructure of jealousy and base thoughts on the fact that poor Dupré and Claire had innocently enjoyed certain tastes in common. True, such friendships—friendships between unmarried men and attractive young married women—are, generally speaking, to be deprecated. Still, Claire had always been "correct"; of that there could now be no doubt.

As he stood there on the pier, staring out, as all those about him and behind him were doing, at the expanse of dark blue sun-flecked sea, there

came over Jacques de Wissant a great lightening of the spirit. . . .

But all too soon his mind, his memory, swung back to the tragic business of the moment.

Suddenly the Admiral burst into speech, addressing himself, rather than the silent man by his side.

"The devil of it is," he exclaimed, "that the nearest salvage appliances are at Cherbourg! Thank God, the Ministry of Marine are alone responsible for that blunder. Dupré and his comrades have, it seems, thirty-six hours' supply of oxygen—if, indeed, they are still living, which I feel tempted to hope they are not. You see, Monsieur de Wissant, I was at Bizerta when the *Lutin* sank. A man doesn't want to remember two such incidents in his career. One is quite bad enough!"

"I suppose it isn't yet known how far the *Neptune* is injured?" inquired the Mayor of Falaise.

But he spoke mechanically; he was not really thinking of what he was saying. His inner and real self were still steeped in that strange mingled feeling of shame and relief—shame that he should have suspected his wife, exultant relief that his jealousy should have been so entirely unfounded.

"No; as usual no one knows exactly what did happen. But we shall learn something of that presently. The divers are on their way. But—but even if the craft did sustain no injury, what

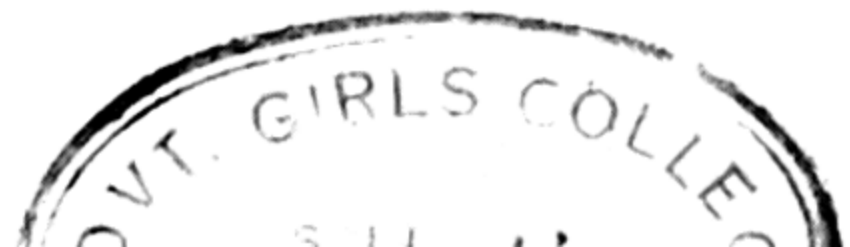
can they do? Ants might as well attempt to pierce a cannon-ball"—he shrugged his shoulders, oppressed by the vision his homely simile had conjured up.

And then—for no particular reason, save that his wife Claire was very present to him—Jacques de Wissant bethought himself that it was most unlikely that any tidings of the accident could yet have reached the Chalet des Dunes, the lonely villa on the shore where Claire was now lunching with her sister. At any moment, however, some casual visitor from the town might come out there with the sad news. He told himself uneasily that it would be well, if possible, to save his wife from such a shock. After all, Claire and that excellent Commander Dupré had been good friends—so much must be admitted, nay, now he was eager to admit it.

Jacques de Wissant touched the older man on the arm.

"I should be most grateful, Admiral, for the loan of your motor-car. I have just remembered that I ought to go home for an hour. This terrible affair made me forget it; but I shall not be long—indeed, I must soon be back, for there will be all sorts of arrangements to be made at the town hall. Of course we shall be besieged with inquiries, with messages from Paris, with telegrams——"

"My car, monsieur, is entirely at your disposal."



The Admiral could not help feeling, even at so sad and solemn a moment as this, a little satirical amusement. Arrangements at the town hall, forsooth! If the end of the world were in sight, the claims of the municipality of Falaise would not be neglected or forgotten; in as far as Jacques de Wissant could arrange it, everything in such a case would be ready at the town hall, if not on the quarter-deck, for the Great Assize!

What had a naval disaster to do with the Mayor of Falaise, after all? But in this matter the old Admiral allowed prejudice to get the better of him; the men now immured in the submarine were, with two exceptions—their commander and his junior officer—all citizens of the town. It was their mothers, wives, children, sweethearts, who were now pressing with wild, agonised faces against the barriers drawn across the end of the pier. . . .

As Jacques de Wissant made his way through the crowd, his grey frock-coat was pulled by many a horny hand, and imploring faces gazed with piteous questioning into his. But he could give them no comfort. For the present the fact that it was the *Neptune* which had gone down was to be concealed.

Not till he found himself actually in the Admiral's car did he give his instructions to the chauffeur.

"Take me to the Chalet des Dunes as quickly

as you can drive without danger," he said briefly. "You probably know where it is?"

The man nodded and looked round considerингly. He had never driven so elegantly attired a gentleman before. Why, M. de Wissant looked like a bridegroom! The Mayor of Falaise should be good for a handsome tip.

The chauffeur did not need to be told that on such a day time was of importance, and once they were out of the narrow, tortuous streets of the town, the Admiral's car flew.

And then, for the first time that day, Jacques de Wissant began to feel pleasantly cool, nay, there even came over him a certain exhilaration.

He had been foolish to hold out against motor-cars. There was a great deal to be said for them, after all. He owed his wife reparation for his evil thoughts of her. He resolved that he would soon give Claire the best automobile money could buy. It is always a mistake to economise in such matters. . . .

But soon his mind took a sudden turn—he felt ashamed of his egoism, and the sensation disturbed him, for the Mayor of Falaise very seldom had occasion to feel ashamed, either of his thoughts or of his actions. How could he have allowed his attention to stray from the subject which should just now be absorbing his whole mind?

Thirty-six hours' supply of oxygen? Well,

it might have been worse, for a great deal can be done in thirty-six hours.

True, all the salvage appliances, so the Admiral had said, were at Cherbourg. What a shameful lack of forethought on some one's part! Still, there was little doubt but that the *Neptune* would be raised in—in time. The British Navy would send her salvage appliances. Jacques de Wissant had once had a traditional distrust of the English, but the *entente cordiale* had banished the feeling. It was comfortable to know, to feel sure that without doubt the gallant English Navy would send salvage appliances. . . .

There would be some hours of suspense—terrible hours for the wives and mothers of the men. But those poor women would be upheld by the universal sympathy shown them. He himself, as Mayor of the town, would do all he could. He would seek these poor women out, say consoling, hopeful things, and Claire would help him. She had, as he knew, a very tender heart, especially where seamen were concerned.

Indeed, yes, it was a terrible thought—that of those brave fellows down there, beneath the surface of the waters. Terrible, that is, if they were alive—alive in the same measure as he, Jacques de Wissant, was now alive in the keen, rushing air. Alive, and waiting for a deliverance that might never come. The idea made him feel a queer, interior tremor of sick fear.

Then his mind, in spite of himself, swung back to its old moorings. How strange that he had not been told that Commander Dupré had applied for a change of command! Doubtless the Mediterranean was better suited, being a tideless sea, for submarine experiments. Keen, clever Dupré, absorbed as he was in his profession, had doubtless thought of that.

But, again, how odd of Claire not to have mentioned that Dupré was leaving Falaise! Of course it was possible that she also had been ignorant of the fact. She very seldom spoke of other people's affairs, and lately she had been so dreadfully worried about her sister's, Marie-Anne's, illness.

If his wife had known nothing of Commander Dupré's plans, it proved, as hardly anything else could have done, how little real intimacy there could have been between them.

A man never leaves the woman he loves unless he has grown tired of her—then, as all the world knows, except perchance the poor soul herself, no place is too far for him to make for.

Such was Jacques de Wissant's simple, cynical philosophy concerning a subject to which he had never given much thought. The tender passion had always appeared to him in one of two shapes—the one was a grotesque and slightly improper shape, which makes men do silly, absurd things; the other came in the semblance

of a sinister demon which wrecks the honour and devastates, as nothing else can do, the happiness of respectable families. It was this second and more hateful form which had haunted him these last few weeks.

He recalled with a dreadful feeling of distaste the state of mind and body he had been in that very morning. Why, he had then been in the mood to kill Dupré, or, at any rate, to welcome the news of his death with fierce joy! And then, simultaneously with his discovery of how groundless had been his jealousy, he had learnt the awful fact that the man whom he had wrongly accused lay out there, buried and yet alive, beneath the glistening sea, which was stretched out, like a great blue pall, on his left.

Still, it was only proper that his wife should be spared the shock of hearing in some casual way of this awful accident. Claire had always been sensitive, curiously so, to everything that concerned the Navy. Admiral de Saint Vilquier had recalled the horrible submarine disaster of Bizerta harbour; Jacques de Wissant now remembered uncomfortably how very unhappy that sad affair had made Claire. Why, one day he had found her in a passion of tears, mourning over the tragic fate of those poor sailor men, the crew of the *Lutin*, of whose very names she was ignorant! At the time he had thought her betrayal of feeling very unreasonable, but now he under-

stood, and even shared to a certain extent, the pain she had shown; but then he knew Dupré, knew and liked him, and the men immured in the *Neptune* were men of Falaise.

These were the thoughts which jostled each other in Jacques de Wissant's brain as he sat back in the Admiral's car.

They were now rushing past the Pavillon de Wissant. What a pity it was that Claire had not remained quietly at home to-day! It would have been so much pleasanter—if one could think of anything being pleasant in such a connection—to have gone in and told her the sad news at home. Her sister, Madeleine Baudoin, though older than Claire, was foolishly emotional and unrestrained in the expression of her feelings. Madeleine was sure to make a scene when she heard of Commander Dupré's peril, and Jacques de Wissant hated scenes.

He now asked himself whether it was really necessary for him to tell his wife the sad news before her sister. All he need do was to send Claire a message by the servant who opened the door to him. He could say that she was wanted at home, and she would think something had happened to one of the children. This would be a good thing, for it would prepare her in a measure for ill tidings.

From what Jacques knew of his wife he believed she would receive the news quietly, and,

of course, he, her husband, would show her every consideration. Again he reminded himself that it would be ridiculous to deny the fact that Claire had made a friend, almost an intimate, of Commander Dupré. It would be natural, nay "correct," for her to be greatly distressed when she heard of the accident.

There came a familiar cutting in the road, and once more the sea lay spread out, an opaque, glistening sheet of steel, before him.

Jacques de Wissant gazed across, with a feeling of melancholy and fearful curiosity, to the swarm of craft, great and small, collected round the place where the *Neptune* lay eighteen fathoms deep. . . .

He hoped Claire would not ask to go back into the town with him in order to hear the latest news. But if she did so ask, then he would raise no objection. Every Falaise woman, whatever her rank in life, was now full of suspense and anxiety, and as the Mayor's wife Claire had a right to share that anxious suspense.

The car was now slowing on the sharp decline leading to the shore, and Jacques de Wissant got up and touched the chauffeur on the shoulder.

"Stop here," he said. "You needn't drive down to the Chalet. I want you to turn and wait for me at the Pavillon de Wissant. Ask my servants to give you some luncheon. I may be

half an hour or more, but I want to get back to Falaise as soon as I can."

The Chalet des Dunes had been well named. It stood enclosed in rough palings in a sandy wilderness. An attempt had been made to turn the immediate surroundings of the villa into the semblance of a garden; there were wind-blown flowers set in sandy flower-beds, and coarse, luxuriant creepers flung their long, green ropes about the wooden verandah. In front, stretching out into the sea, was a stone pier, built by Jacques' father many a year ago.

The Chalet looked singularly quiet and deserted, for all the shutters had been closed in order to shut out the midday heat.

Jacques de Wissant became vaguely uneasy. He reconsidered his plan of action. If the two sisters were alone together—as he supposed them to be—he would go in and quietly tell them of the accident. It would be making altogether too much of the matter to send for Claire to come out to him; she might very properly resent it. For the matter of that, it was quite possible that Madeleine Baudoin had some little sentiment for Dupré. That would explain so much—the officer's constant presence at the Chalet des Dunes added to his absence from the Pavillon.

It was odd that he, Jacques, had never thought of that possibility before.

But the half suspicion that this might be so

made him grow uneasy at the thought of the task which now lay before him, and it was with slow, hesitating steps that he walked up to the little front door of the Chalet.

He pulled the rusty bell-handle. How absurd to have ironwork in such a place!

There followed what seemed to him a very long pause. He rang again.

Then came the sound of light, swift footsteps; he could hear them quite plainly in spite of the rhythmical surge of the sea. At last the door was opened by his sister-in-law, Madame Baudoin, herself.

In the midst of his own agitation and unease, Jacques de Wissant saw that there was a look of embarrassment on the face which Madeleine tried to make amiably welcoming.

"Jacques?" she exclaimed. "Forgive me for having made you ring twice! I have sent the servants into Falaise to purchase a railway time-table. Claire will doubtless have told you that I am starting for Italy to-night. Our poor Marie-Anne is worse; and I feel that it is my duty to go to her."

She did not step aside to allow him to come in. In fact, doubtless without meaning to do so, she was actually blocking up the door.

No, Claire had not told Jacques that Marie-Anne was worse. That, of course, was why she had looked so unhappy this morning. He felt hurt and angered by his wife's reserve.

"I am sure you will agree, Madeleine," he said stiffly—he was not sorry to gain a little time—"that it would not be wise for Claire to accompany you to Italy. After all, she is still quite a young woman, and poor Marie-Anne's disease is most infectious. I have ascertained, too, that there is a regular epidemic raging in Mantua."

Madeleine nodded. Then she turned, with an uneasy side-look at her brother-in-law, and began leading the way down the short passage. The door of the dining-room was open; Jacques could not help seeing that only one place was laid at the round table, also that Madeleine had just finished her luncheon.

"Isn't Claire here?" he asked, surprised. "She said she was going to lunch with you today. Hasn't she been here this morning?"

"No—I mean yes." Madeleine spoke confusedly. "She did not stay to lunch. She was only here for a very little while."

"But has she gone home again?"

"Well—she may be home by now; I really don't know"—Madeleine was opening the door of the little drawing-room.

It was an ugly, common-looking room; the walls were hung with Turkey red, and ornamented with cheap coloured prints. But there were cane and basket chairs which Madame Baudoin had striven to make comfortable with the help of cushions and rugs.

Jacques de Wissant told himself that it was

odd that Claire should like to spend so much of her time here, in the Chalet des Dunes, instead of asking her sister to join her each morning or afternoon in her own beautiful house on the cliff.

"Forgive me," he said stiffly, "but I can't stay a moment. I really came for Claire. You say I shall find her at home?"

He held his top hat and his yellow gloves in his hand, and his sister-in-law thought she had never seen Jacques look so plain and unattractive, and—and tiresome, as he looked to-day.

Madame Baudoin had a special reason for wishing him away; but she knew the slow, sure workings of his mind. If Jacques found that his wife had not gone back to the Pavillon de Wissant, and that there was no news of her there, he would almost certainly come back to the Chalet des Dunes for further information.

"No," she said reluctantly, "Claire has not gone back to the Pavillon. I believe that she has gone into the town. She had something important that she wished to do there."

She looked so troubled, so—so uncomfortable that Jacques de Wissant leapt to the sudden conclusion that the tidings he had been at such pains to bring had already been brought to the Chalet des Dunes.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "then I am too late! Ill news travels fast."

"Ill news?" Madeleine repeated affrightedly. "Is anything the matter? Has anything hap-

pened to one of the children? Don't keep me in suspense, Jacques. I am not cold-blooded—like you!"

"The children are all right," he said shortly. "But there has been, as you evidently know, an accident. The submarine *Neptune* has met with a serious mishap. She now lies with her crew in eighteen fathoms of water about two miles out."

He spoke with cold acerbity. How childishly foolish of Madeleine to try to deceive him! But all women of the type to which she belonged make foolish mysteries about nothing.

"The submarine *Neptune*?" As she stammered out the question which had already been answered, there came over Madame Baudoin's face a look of measureless terror. Twice her lips opened—and twice she closed them again.

At last she uttered a few words—words of anguished protest and revolt. "No, no," she cried, "that can't be—it's impossible!"

"Command yourself!" he said sternly. "Remember what would be thought by anyone who saw you in this state."

But she went on, looking at him with wild, terror-stricken eyes. "My poor Claire!" she moaned. "My little sister Claire——"

All Jacques de Wissant's jealousy leapt into eager, quivering life. Then he had been right after all? His wife loved Dupré. Her sister's anguished sympathy had betrayed Claire's secret

as nothing Claire herself was ever likely to say or do could have done.

"You are a good sister," he said ironically, "to take Claire's distress so much to heart. Identifying yourself as entirely as you seem to do with her grief, I am surprised that you did not accompany her into Falaise: it was most wrong of you to let her go alone."

"Claire is not in Falaise," muttered Madeleine.

She was grasping the back of one of the cane chairs with her hand as if glad of even that slight support, and staring at him with a dazed look of abject misery which increased his anger, his—his disgust.

"Not in Falaise?" he echoed sharply. "Then where, in God's name, is she?"

A most disagreeable possibility had flashed into his mind. Was it conceivable that his wife had had herself rowed to the scene of the disaster? If she had done that, if her sister had allowed her to go alone, or accompanied maybe by one or other of the officers belonging to the submarine flotilla, then he told himself with jealous rage that he would find it very difficult ever to forgive Claire. There are things a woman with any self-respect, especially a woman who is the mother of daughters, refrains from doing.

"Well?" he said contemptuously. "Well, Madeleine? I am waiting to hear the truth. I desire no explanations—no excuses. I cannot, however, withhold myself from telling you that

you ought to have accompanied your sister, even if you found it impossible to control her."

"I was there yesterday," said Madeleine Baudoin, with a pinched, white face, "for over two hours."

"What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously. "Where were you yesterday for over two hours."

"In the *Neptune*."

She gazed at him, past him, with widely open eyes, as if she were staring, fascinated, at some scene of unutterable horror—and there crept into Jacques de Wissant's mind a thought so full of shameful dread that he thrust it violently from him.

"You were in the *Neptune*," he said slowly, "knowing well that it is absolutely forbidden for any officer to take a friend on board a submarine without a special permit from the Minister of Marine?"

"It is sometimes done," she said listlessly.

Madame Baudoin had now sat down on a low chair, and she was plucking at the front of her white serge skirt with a curious mechanical movement of the fingers.

"Did the submarine actually put out to sea with you on board?"

She nodded her head, and then very deliberately added, "Yes, I have told you that I was out for two hours. They all knew it—the men and officers of the flotilla. I was horribly frightened,

but—but now I am glad indeed that I went. Yes, I am indeed glad!"

"Why are you glad?" he asked roughly—and again a terrible and a hateful suspicion thrust itself insistently upon him.

"I am glad I went, because it will make what Claire has done to-day seem natural, a—a simple escapade."

There was a moment of terrible silence between them.

"Then do all the officers and men belonging to the flotilla know that my wife is out there—in the *Neptune*?" Jacques de Wissant asked in a low, still voice.

"No," said Madeleine, and there was now a look of shame, as well as of terror, on her face. "They none of them know—only those who are on board." She hesitated a moment—"That is why I sent the servants away this morning. We—I mean Commander Dupré and I—did not think it necessary that anyone should know."

"Then no one—that is, only a hare-brained young officer and ten men belonging to the town of Falaise—were to be aware of the fact that my wife had accompanied her lover on this life-risking expedition? You and Dupré were indeed tender of her honour—and mine."

"Jacques!" She took her hand off the chair, and faced her brother-in-law proudly. "What infamous thing is this that you are harbouring in

your mind? My sister is an honest woman, aye, as honest, as high-minded as was your own mother——"

He stopped her with a violent gesture. "Do not mention Claire and my mother in the same breath!" he cried.

"Ah, but I will—I must! You want the truth—you said just now you wanted only the truth. Then you shall hear the truth! Yes, it is as you have evidently suspected. Louis Dupré loves Claire, and she"—her voice faltered, then grew firmer—"she may have had for him a little sentiment. Who can tell? You have not been at much pains to make her happy. But what is true, what is certain, is that she rejected his love. To-day they were to part—for ever."

Her voice failed again, then once more it strengthened and hardened.

"That is why he in a moment of folly—I admit it was in a moment of folly—asked her to come out on his last cruise in the *Neptune*. When you came I was expecting them back any moment. But, Jacques, do not be afraid. I swear to you that no one shall ever know. Admiral de Saint Vilquier will do anything for us Kergouëts; I myself will go to him, and—and explain."

But Jacques de Wissant scarcely heard the eager, pitiful words.

He had thrust his wife from his mind, and her place had been taken by his honour—his honour

and that of his children, of happy, light-hearted Clairette and Jacqueline. . . .

For what seemed a long while he said nothing; then, with all the anger gone from his voice, he spoke, uttered a fiat.

"No," he said quietly. "You must leave the Admiral to me, Madeleine. You were going to Italy to-night, were you not? That, I take it, *is* true."

She nodded impatiently. What did her proposed journey to Italy matter compared with her beloved Claire's present peril?

"Well, you must carry out your plan, my poor Madeleine. You must go away, to-night."

She stared at him, her face at last blotched with tears, and a look of bewildered anguish in her eyes.

"You must do this," Jacques de Wissant went on deliberately, "for Claire's sake, and for the sake of Claire's children. You haven't sufficient self-control to endure suspense calmly, secretly. You need not go farther than Paris, but those whom it concerns will be told that Claire has gone with you to Italy. There will always be time to tell the truth. Meanwhile, the Admiral and I will devise a plan. And perhaps"—he waited a moment—"the truth will never be known, or only known to a very few people—people who, as you say, will understand."

He had spoken very slowly, as if weighing each of his words, but it was quickly, with a

queer catch in his voice, that he added—"I ask you to do this, my sister"—he had never before called Madeleine Baudoin "my sister"—"because of Claire's children, of Clairette and Jacqueline. Their mother would not wish a slur to rest upon them."

She looked at him with piteous, hunted eyes. But she knew that she must do what he asked.

IV

Jacques de Wissant sat at his desk in the fine old room, which is set aside for the Mayor's sole use in the town hall of Falaise.

He was waiting for Admiral de Saint Vilquier, whom he had summoned on the plea of a matter both private and urgent. In his note, of which he had written more than one draft, he had omitted none of the punctilio usual in French official correspondence, and he had asked pardon, in the most formal language, for asking the Admiral to come to him, instead of proposing to go to the Admiral.

The time that had elapsed since he had parted from his sister-in-law had seemed like years instead of hours, and yet every moment of those hours had been filled with action.

From the Chalet des Dunes Jacques had made his way straight to the Pavillon de Wissant, and there his had been the bitter task of lying to his household.

But they had all accepted unquestioningly his statement that their mistress, without waiting even to go home, had left the Chalet des Dunes with her sister for Italy owing to the arrival of sudden worse news from Mantua.

While Claire's luggage was being by his orders hurriedly prepared, he had changed his clothes; and then, overcome with mortal weariness, with sick, sombre suspense, he had returned to Falaise, taking the railway station on his way to the town hall, and from there going through the grim comedy of despatching his wife's trunks to Paris.

Since the day in 1870, when war was declared by France on Germany, there had never been at the town hall of Falaise so busy an afternoon. Urgent messages of inquiry and condolence came pouring in from all over the civilised world, and the Mayor had to compose suitable answers to them all.

To him there also fell the painful duty of officially announcing to the crowd surging impatiently in the market place—though room in front was always made and kept for those of the fisher folk who had relatives in the submarine service—that it was the *Neptune* which had gone down.

He had seen the effect of that announcement painted on rough, worn, upturned faces; he had heard the cries of anger, the groans of despair of the few, and had witnessed the relief, the tears of joy of the many. But his heart felt numb,

and his cold, stern manner kept the emotions and excitement of those about him in check.

At last there had come a short respite. It was publicly announced that owing to the currents the divers had had to suspend their work awhile, but that salvage appliances from England and from Cherbourg were on their way to Falaise, and it was hoped that by seven that evening active operations would begin.

With luck the *Neptune* might be raised before midnight; and fortunate people blessed with optimistic natures were already planning a banquet at which the crew of the *Neptune* were to be entertained within an hour of the rescue.

Jacques de Wissant rose from the massive First Empire table which formed part of the fine suite of furniture presented by the great Napoleon just a hundred years ago to the municipality of Falaise.

With bent head, his hands clasped behind him, the Mayor began walking up and down the long room.

Admiral de Saint Vilquier might now come at any moment, but the man awaiting him had not yet made up his mind how to word what he had to say—how much to tell, how much to conceal from, his wife's old friend. He was only too well aware that if the desperate attempts which would soon be made to raise the *Neptune* were successful, and if its human freight were rescued

alive, the fact that there had been a woman on board could not be concealed. Thousands must know to-night, and millions to-morrow morning.

Not only would the amazing story provide newspaper readers all over the world with a thrilling, unexpected piece of news, but the fact that there had been a woman involved in the disaster would be perpetuated, as long as our civilisation endures, in every account of subsequent accidents to submarine craft.

More intimately, vividly agonising was the knowledge that the story, the scandal, would be revived when there arose the all-important question of a suitable marriage for Clairette or Jacqueline.

As he paced up and down the room, longing for and yet dreading the coming of the Admiral, he visualised what would happen. He could almost hear the whispered words: "Yes, dear friend, the girl is admirably brought up, and has a large fortune, also she and your son have taken quite a fancy for one another, but there is that very ugly story of the mother! Don't you remember that she was with her lover in the submarine *Neptune?* The citizens of Falaise still laugh at the story and point her out in the street. Like mother like daughter, you know!"

Thus the miserable man tortured himself, turning the knife in his wound.

But stay—— Supposing the salvage appliances failed, as they had failed at Bizerta, to raise the

Neptune? Then with the help of Admiral de Saint Vilquier the awful truth might be kept secret.

At last the door opened.

Jacques de Wissant took a step forward, and as his hand rested loosely for a moment in the old seaman's firmer grasp, he would have given many years of his life to postpone the coming interview.

"As you asked me so urgently to do so, I have come, M. de Wissant, to learn what you have to tell me. But I'm afraid the time I can spare you must be short. As you know, I am to be at the station in half an hour to meet the Minister of Marine. He will probably wish to go out at once to the scene of the calamity, and I shall have to accompany him."

The Admiral was annoyed at having been thus sent for to the town hall. It was surely Jacques de Wissant's place to have come to him.

And then, while listening to the other's murmured excuses, the old naval officer happened to look straight into the face of the Mayor of Falaise, and at once a change came over his manner, even his voice softened and altered.

"Pardon my saying so, M. de Wissant," he exclaimed abruptly, "but you look extremely ill! You mustn't allow this sad business to take such a hold on you. It is tragic no doubt that such things must be; but remember"—he uttered

the words solemnly—"they are the Price of Admiralty."

"I know, I know," muttered Jacques de Wissant.

"Shall we sit down?"

The deadly pallor, the look of strain on the face of the man before him was making the Admiral feel more and more uneasy. "It would be very awkward," he thought to himself, "were Jacques de Wissant to be taken ill, here, now, with me—— Ah, I have it!"

Then he said aloud, "You have doubtless had nothing to eat since the morning?" And as de Wissant nodded—"But that's absurd! It's always madness to go without food. Believe me, you will want all your strength during the next few days. As for me, I had fortunately lunched before I received the sad news. I keep to the old hours; I do not care for your English *déjeuners* at one o'clock. Midday is late enough for me!"

"Admiral?" said the wretched man, "Admiral——?"

"Yes, take your time; I am not really in such a hurry. I am quite at your disposal."

"It is a question of honour," muttered Jacques de Wissant, "a question of honour, Admiral, or I should not trouble you with the matter."

Admiral de Saint Vilquier leant forward, but Jacques de Wissant avoided meeting the shrewd, searching eyes.

"The honour of a naval family is involved." The Mayor of Falaise was now speaking in a low, pleading voice.

The Admiral stiffened. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "So you have been asked to intercede with me on behalf of some young scapegrace. Well, who is it? I'll look into the matter to-morrow morning. I really cannot think of anything to-day but of this terrible business——"

"—— Admiral, it concerns this business."

"The loss of the *Neptune*? In what way can the honour of a naval family be possibly involved in such a matter?" There was a touch of hauteur as well as of indignant surprise in the fine old seaman's voice.

"Admiral," said Jacques de Wissant deliberately, "there was—there is—a woman on board the *Neptune*."

"A woman in the *Neptune*? That is quite impossible!" The Admiral got up from his chair. "It is one of our strictest regulations that no stranger be taken on board a submarine without a special permit from the Minister of Marine, countersigned by an admiral. No such permit has been issued for many months. In no case would a woman be allowed on board. Commander Dupré is far too conscientious, too loyal, an officer to break such a regulation."

"Commander Dupré," said Jacques de Wissant in a low, bitter tone, "was not too conscientious or too loyal an officer to break that regula-

tion, for there is, I repeat it, a woman in the *Neptune*."

The Admiral sat down again. "But this is serious—very serious," he muttered.

He was thinking of the effect, not only at home but abroad, of such a breach of discipline.

He shook his head with a pained, angry gesture—"I understand what happened," he said at last. "The woman was, of course, poor Dupré's"—and then something in Jacques de Wissant's pallid face made him substitute, for the plain word he meant to have used, a softer, kindlier phrase—"poor Dupré's *bonne amie*," he said.

"I am advised not," said Jacques de Wissant shortly. "I am told that the person in question is a young lady."

"Do you mean an unmarried girl?" asked the Admiral. There was great curiosity and sincere relief in his voice.

"I beg of you not to ask me, Admiral! The family of the lady have implored me to reveal as little of the truth as possible. They have taken their own measures, and they are good measures, to account for her—her disappearance." The unhappy man spoke with considerable agitation.

"Quite so! Quite so! They are right. I have no wish to show indiscreet curiosity."

"Do you think anything can be done to prevent the fact becoming known?" asked Jacques de Wissant—and, as the other waited a moment

before answering, the suspense became almost more than he could endure. He got up and instinctively stood with his back to the light. "The family of this young lady are willing to make any pecuniary sacrifice——"

"It is not a question of pecuniary sacrifice," the Admiral said stiffly. "Money will never really purchase either secrecy or silence. But honour, M. de Wissant, will sometimes, nay, often, do both."

"Then you think the fact can be concealed?"

"I think it will be impossible to conceal it if the *Neptune* is raised"—he hesitated, and his voice sank as he added the poignant words "*in time*. But if that happens, though I fear that it is not likely to happen, then I promise you that I will allow it to be thought that I had given this lady permission to go out for a short cruise. Thus her improper action will be accepted for what it no doubt was—a foolish escapade. If Dupré and little Paritot are the men of honour I take them to be, one or other of them will, of course, have to marry her!"

"And if the *Neptune* is not raised——" the Mayor's voice also dropped to a whisper—"*in time*—what then?"

"Then," said the Admiral, "everything will be done by me—so you can assure your unlucky friends—to conceal the fact that Commander Dupré failed in his duty. Not for his sake, you understand—he, I fear, deserves what he has

suffered, what he is perhaps still suffering,"—a look of horror stole over his old, weather-roughened face—"but for the sake of the foolish girl and for the sake of her family. You say it is a naval family?"

"Yes," said Jacques de Wissant. "A noted naval family."

The Admiral got up. "And now I, on my side, must exact of you a pledge, M. de Wissant——" he looked searchingly at the Government official standing before him. "I solemnly implore you, monsieur, to keep this fact you have told me absolutely secret for the time being—secret even from the Minister of Marine."

The Mayor of Falaise bent his head. "I intend to act," he said slowly, "as if I had never heard it."

"I ask it for the honour, the repute, of the Service," muttered the old officer. "After all, M. de Wissant, the poor fellow did not mean much harm. We sailors have all, at different times of our lives, had some *bonne amie* whom we found it devilish hard to leave on shore!"

The Admiral walked slowly towards the door. To-day had aged him years.

Then he turned and looked benignantly at Jacques de Wissant; the man before him might be stiff, cold, awkward in manner, but he was a gentleman, a man of honour.

And as he drove to the station to meet the Minister of Marine, Admiral de Saint Vilquier's

shrewd, practical mind began to deal with the difficult problem which was now added to his other cares. It was simplified in view of the fact —the awful fact—that according to his private information it was most unlikely that the submarine would be raised within the next few hours. He hoped with all his heart that the twelve men and the woman now lying beneath the sea had met death at the moment of the collision.

All that summer night the cafés and eating-houses of Falaise remained open, and there was a constant coming and going to the beach, where many people, even among those visitors who were not directly interested in the calamity, camped out on the stones.

The Mayor sent word to the Pavillon de Wissant that he would sleep in his town house, but though he left the town hall at two in the morning he was back at his post by eight, and he spent there the whole of the next long dragging day.

Fortunately for him there was little time for thought, for in addition to the messages of inquiry and condolence which went on pouring in, important members of the Government arrived from Paris and the provinces.

There also came to Falaise the mother of Commander Dupré, and the father and brother of Lieutenant Paritot. De Wissant made the latter

his special care. They, the two men, were granted the relief of tears, but Madame Dupré's silent agony could not be assuaged.

Once, when he suddenly came upon her sitting, her chin in her hand, in his room at the town hall, Jacques de Wissant shrank from her blazing eyes and ravaged face, so vividly did they recall to him the eyes, the face, he had seen that April evening "'twixt dog and wolf," when he had first leapt upon the truth.

On the third day all hope that there could be anyone still living in the *Neptune* was being abandoned, and yet at noon there ran a rumour through the town that knocking had been heard in the submarine. . . .

The Mayor himself drew up an official proclamation, in which it was pointed out that it was almost certain that all on board had perished at the time of the collision, and that, even if any of them had survived for a few hours, not one could be alive now.

And then, as one by one the days of waiting began to wear themselves away, the world, apart from the town which numbered ten of her sons among the doomed men, relaxed its painful interest in the fate of the French submarine. Indeed, Falaise took on an almost winter stillness of aspect, for the summer visitors naturally drifted away from a spot which was still the heart of an awful tragedy.

But Jacques de Wissant did not relax in his duties or in his efforts on behalf of the families of the men who still lay, eighteen fathoms deep, encased in their steel tomb; and the townspeople were deeply moved by their Mayor's continued, if restrained, distress. He even put his children, his pretty twin daughters, Jacqueline and Clairette, into deep mourning; this touched the seafaring portion of the population very much.

It also became known that M. de Wissant was suffering from domestic distress of a very sad and intimate kind; his sister-in-law was seriously ill in Italy from an infectious disease, and his wife, who had gone away at a moment's notice to help to nurse her, had caught the infection.

The Mayor of Falaise and Admiral de Saint Vilquier did not often have occasion to meet during those days spent by each of them in entertaining official personages, and in composing answers to the messages and inquiries which went on dropping in, both by day and by night, at the town hall and at the Admiral's quarters. But there came an hour when Admiral de Saint Vilquier at last sought to have a private word with the Mayor of Falaise.

"I think I have arranged everything satisfactorily," he said briefly, "and you can convey the fact to your friends. I do not suppose, as matters are now, that there is much fear that the truth will ever come out."

The old man did not look into Jacques de Wissant's face while he uttered the comforting words. He had become aware of many things —including Madeleine Baudoin's cruise in the *Neptune* the day before the accident, and of her own and Claire de Wissant's reported departure for Italy.

Alone, among the people who sometimes had friendly speech of the Mayor during those sombre days of waiting, Admiral de Saint Vilquier did not condole with the anxious husband on the fact that he could not yet leave Falaise for Mantua.

V

Jacques de Wissant woke with a start and sat up in bed. He had heard a knock—but, awake or sleeping, his ears were never free of the sound of knocking,—of muffled, regular knocking. . . .

It was the darkest hour of the summer night, but with a sharp sense of relief he became aware that what had wakened him this time was a real sound, not the slow, patient, rhythmical, tapping which haunted him incessantly. For now the knocking had been followed by the opening of his bedroom door, and vaguely outlined before him was the short, squat form of an old woman who had entered his mother's service

when he was a little boy, and who always stayed in his town house.

"M'sieur l'Amiral de Saint Vilquier desires to see M'sieur Jacques on urgent business," she whispered. "I have put him to wait in the great drawing-room. It is fortunate that I took all the covers off the furniture yesterday."

Then the moment of ordeal, the moment he had begun to think would never come—was upon him. He knew this summons to mean that the *Neptune* had been finally towed into the harbour, and that now, in this still, dark hour before dawn, was about to begin the work of taking out the bodies.

Every day for a week past it had been publicly announced that the following night would see the final scene of the dread drama, and each evening—even last evening—it had been as publicly announced that nothing could be done for the present.

Jacques de Wissant had put all his trust in the Admiral, and in the arrangements the Admiral was making to avoid discovery. But now, as he got up and dressed himself—strange to say that phantom sound of tapping had suddenly ceased—there came over him a frightful sensation of doubt and fear. Had he been right to trust wholly to the old naval officer? Would it not have been better to have taken the Minister of Marine into his confidence?

How would it be possible for Admiral de

Saint Vilquier, unless backed by Governmental authority, to elude the vigilance, not only of the Admiralty officials and of all those that were directly interested, but also of the journalists who, however much the public interest had slackened in the disaster, still stayed on at Falaise in order to be present at the last act of the tragedy?

These thoughts jostled each other in Jacques de Wissant's brain. But whether he had been right or wrong it was too late to alter now.

He went into the room where the Admiral stood waiting for him.

The two men shook hands, but neither spoke till they had left the house. Then, as they walked with firm, quick steps across the deserted market-place, the Admiral said suddenly, "This is the quietest hour in the twenty-four, and though I anticipate a little trouble with the journalists, I think everything will go off quite well."

His companion muttered a word of assent, and the other went on, this time in a gruff whisper: "By the way, I have had to tell Dr. Tarnier—" and as Jacques de Wissant gave vent to a stifled exclamation of dismay—"of course I had to tell Dr. Tarnier! He has most nobly offered to go down into the *Neptune* alone—though in doing so he will run considerable personal risk.

Admiral de Saint Vilquier paused a moment,

for the quick pace at which his companion was walking made him rather breathless. "I have simply told him that there was a young woman on board. He imagines her to have been a Parisienne,—a person of no importance, you understand,—who had come to spend the holiday with poor Dupré. But he quite realises that the fact must never be revealed." He spoke in a dry, matter-of-fact tone. "There will not be room on the pontoon for more than five or six, including ourselves and Dr. Tarnier. Doubtless some of our newspaper friends will be disappointed—if one can speak of disappointment in such a connection—but they will have plenty of opportunities of being present to-morrow and the following nights. I have arranged with the Minister of Marine for the work to be done only at night."

As the two men emerged on the quays, they saw that the news had leaked out, for knots of people stood about, talking in low hushed tones, and staring at the middle of the harbour.

Apart from the others, and almost dangerously close to the unguarded edge below which was the dark lapping water, stood a line of women shrouded in black, and from them there came no sound.

As the Admiral and his companion approached the little group of officials who were apparently waiting for them, the old naval officer whispered to Jacques de Wissant, using for the first time

the familiar expression, "*mon ami*," "Do not forget, *mon ami*, to thank the harbour-master and the pilot. They have had a very difficult task, and they will expect your commendation."

Jacques de Wissant said the words required of him. And then, at the last moment, just as he was on the point of going down the steps leading to the flat-bottomed boat in which they were to be rowed to the pontoon, there arose an angry discussion. The harbour-master had, it seemed, promised the representatives of two Paris newspapers that they should be present when the submarine was first opened.

But the Admiral stiffly asserted his supreme authority. "In such matters I can allow no favouritism! It is doubtful if any bodies will be taken out to-night, gentlemen, for the tide is already turning. I will see if other arrangements can be made to-morrow. If any of you had been in the harbour of Bizerta when the *Lutin* was raised, you would now thank me for not allowing you to view the sight which we may be about to see."

And the weary, disappointed special correspondents, who had spent long days watching for this one hour, realised that they would have to content themselves with describing what could be seen from the quays.

It will, however, surprise no one familiar with the remarkable enterprise of the modern Press,

when it is recorded that by far the most accurate account of what occurred during the hour that followed was written by a cosmopolitan war correspondent, who had had the good fortune of making Dr. Tarnier's acquaintance during the dull fortnight of waiting.

He wrote:—

"None of those who were there will ever forget what they saw last night in the harbour of Falaise.

"The scene, illumined by the searchlight of a destroyer, was at once sinister, sombre, and magnificent. Below the high, narrow pontoon, on the floor of the harbour, lay the wrecked submarine; and those who gazed down at the *Neptune* felt as though they were in the presence of what had once been a sentient being done to death by some huge Goliath of the deep.

"Dr. Tarnier, the chief medical officer of the port—a man who is beloved and respected by the whole population of Falaise—stood ready to begin his dreadful task. I had ascertained that he had obtained permission to go down alone into the hold of death—an exploration attended with the utmost physical risk.

"He was clad in a suit of india-rubber clothing, and over his arm was folded a large tarpaulin sheet lined with carbolic wool, one of half a dozen such sheets lying at his feet.

"The difficult work of unsealing the conning

tower was then proceeded with in the presence of Admiral de Saint Vilquier, whose prowess as a midshipman is still remembered by British Crimean veterans—and of the Mayor of Falaise, M. Jacques de Wissant.

"At last there came a guttural exclamation of '*Ça y est!*' and Dr. Tarnier stepped downwards, to emerge a moment later with the first body, obviously that of the gallant Commander Dupré, who was found, as it was expected he would be, in the conning tower.

"Once more the doctor's burly figure disappeared, once more he emerged, tenderly bearing a slighter, lighter burden, obviously the boyish form of Lieutenant Paritot, who was found close to Commander Dupré.

"The tide was rising rapidly, but two more bodies—this time with the help of a webbed band cleverly designed by Dr. Tarnier with a view to the purpose—were lifted from the inner portion of the submarine.

"The four bodies, rather to the disappointment of the large crowd which had gradually gathered on the quays, were not taken directly to the shore, to the great hall where Falaise is to mourn her dead sons; one by one they were reverently conveyed, by the Admiral's orders, to a barge which was once used as a hospital ward for sick sailors, and which is close to the mouth of the harbour. Thence, when all twelve bodies have been recovered—that is, in three or four days, for the

work is only to be proceeded with at night,—they will be taken to the Salle d'Armes, there to await the official obsequies."

On the morning following the night during which the last body was lifted from within the *Neptune,* there ran a curious rumour through the fishing quarter of the town. It was said that thirteen bodies—not twelve, as declared the official report—had been taken out of the *Neptune.* It was declared on the authority of one of the seamen—a Gascon, be it noted—who had been there on that first night, that five, not four, bodies had been conveyed to the hospital barge.

But the rumour, though it found an echo in the French Press, was not regarded as worth an official denial, and it received its final quietus on the day of the official obsequies, when it was at once seen that the number of ammunition wagons heading the great procession was twelve.

As long as tradition endures in the life of the town, Falaise will remember the *Neptune* funeral procession. Not only was every navy in the world represented, but also every strand of that loosely woven human fabric we civilised peoples call a nation.

Through the long line of soldiers, each man with his arms reversed, walked the official mourners, while from the fortifications there boomed the minute gun.

First the President of the French Republic, with, to his right, the Minister of Marine; and close behind them the stiff, still vigorous, figure of old Admiral de Saint Vilquier. By his side walked the Mayor of Falaise—so mortally pale, so what the French call undone, that the Admiral felt fearful lest his neighbour should be compelled to fall out.

But Jacques de Wissant was not minded to fall out.

The crowd looking on, especially the wives of those substantial citizens of the town who stood at their windows behind half-closed shutters and drawn blinds, stared down at the Mayor with pitying concern.

"He has a warm heart though a cold manner," murmured these ladies to one another, "and just now, you know, he is in great anxiety, for his wife—that beautiful Claire with whom he doesn't get on very well—is in Italy, seriously ill of scarlet fever." "Yes, and as soon as this sad ceremony is over, he will leave for the south—I hear that the President has offered him a seat in his saloon as far as Paris."

As the head of the procession at last stopped on the great parade ground where the last honours were to be rendered to the lowly yet illustrious dead, Jacques de Wissant straightened himself with an instinctive gesture, and his lips began to move. He was muttering to

himself the speech he would soon have to deliver, and which he had that morning, making a great mental effort, committed to memory.

And after the President had had his long, emotional, and flowery say; and when the oldest of French admirals had stepped forward and, in a quavering voice, bidden the dead farewell on behalf of the Navy, it came to the turn of the Mayor of Falaise.

Very deliberately Jacques de Wissant walked up the little wooden stairs leading to the *estrade d'honneur*.

He was there, he said, simply as the mouthpiece of his fellow-townsmen, and they, bowed as they were by deep personal grief, could say but little—they could indeed only murmur their eternal gratitude for the sympathy they had received, and were now receiving, from their countrymen and from the world.

Then the speaker gave a brief personal account of each of the ten seamen whom this vast concourse had gathered together to honour. It was noted by the curious in such things that he made no allusion to the two officers, to Commander Dupré and Lieutenant Paritot; doubtless he thought that they after all, had been amply honoured in the preceding speeches.

But though his care for the lowly heroes proved the Mayor of Falaise a good Republican, he showed himself in the popular estimation

also a scholar, for he wound up with the old tag—the grand old tag which inspired so many noble souls in the proudest of ancient empires and civilisations, and which will retain the power of moving and thrilling generations yet unborn in both the Western and the Eastern worlds:—

"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori."

WHY THEY MARRIED

WHY THEY MARRIED

"God doeth all things well, though by what strange, solemn, and murderous contrivances."

I

JOHN COXETER was sitting with his back to the engine in a first-class carriage in the Paris-Boulogne night train. Not only Englishmen, but Englishmen of a peculiarly definite class, that of the London civil servant, was written all over his spare, still active figure.

It was late September, and the rush homewards had begun; so Coxeter, being a man of precise and careful habit, had reserved a corner seat. Then, just before the train had started, a certain Mrs. Archdale, a young widowed lady with whom he was acquainted, had come up to him on the Paris platform, and to her he had given up his seat.

Coxeter had willingly made the little sacrifice of his personal comfort, but he had felt annoyed when Mrs. Archdale in her turn had yielded the

corner place with foolish altruism to a French lad exchanging vociferous farewells with his parents. When the train started the boy did not give the seat back to the courteous Englishwoman to whom it belonged, and Coxeter, more vexed by the matter than it was worth, would have liked to punch the boy's head.

And yet, as he now looked straight before him, sitting upright in the carriage which was rocking and jolting as only a French railway carriage can rock and jolt, he realised that he himself had gained by the lad's lack of honesty. By having thus given away something which did not belong to her, Mrs. Archdale was now seated, if uncomfortably hemmed in and encompassed on each side, just opposite to Coxeter himself.

Coxeter was well aware that to stare at a woman is the height of bad breeding, but unconsciously he drew a great distinction between what is good taste to do when one is being observed, and that which one does when no one can catch one doing it. Without making the slightest effort, in fact by looking straight before him, Nan Archdale fell into his direct line of vision, and he allowed his eyes to rest on her with an unwilling sense that there was nothing in the world he had rather they rested on. Her appearance pleased his fastidious, rather old-fashioned taste. Mrs. Archdale was wearing a long grey cloak. On her head was poised a dark hat trimmed with Mercury wings; it rested lightly on the pale

golden hair which formed so agreeable a contrast to her deep blue eyes.

Coxeter did not believe in luck; the word which means so much to many men had no place in his vocabulary, or even in his imagination. But, still, the sudden appearance of Mrs. Archdale in the great Paris station had been an agreeable surprise, one of those incidents which, just because of their unexpectedness, make a man feel not only pleased with himself, but at one with the world.

Before Mrs. Archdale had come up to the carriage door at which he was standing, several things had contributed to put Coxeter in an ill-humour.

It had seemed to his critical British phlegm that he was surrounded, immersed against his will, in floods of emotion. Among his fellow travellers the French element predominated. Heavens! how they talked—jabbered would be the better word—laughed and cried! How they hugged and embraced one another! Coxeter thanked God he was an Englishman.

His feeling of bored disgust was intensified by the conduct of a long-nosed, sallow man, who had put his luggage into the same carriage as that where Coxeter's seat had been reserved.

Strange how the peculiar characteristics common to the Jewish race survive, whatever be the accident of nationality. This man also was saying good-bye, his wife being a dark, thin, eager-

looking woman of a very common French type. Coxeter looked at them critically, he wondered idly if the woman was Jewish too. On the whole he thought not. She was half crying, half laughing, her hands now clasping her husband's arm, now travelling, with a gesture of tenderness, up to his fleshy face, while he seemed to tolerate rather than respond to her endearments and extravagant terms of affection. "*Adieu, mon petit homme adoré!*" she finally exclaimed, just as the tickets were being examined, and to Coxeter's surprise the adored one answered in a very English voice, albeit the utterance was slightly thick, "There, there! That'ull do, my dear girl. It's only for a fortnight after all."

Coxeter felt a pang of sincere pity for the poor fellow; a cad, no doubt—but an English cad, cursed with an emotional French wife!

Then his attention had been most happily diverted by the unexpected appearance of Mrs. Archdale. She had come up behind him very quietly, and he had heard her speak before actually seeing her. "Mr. Coxeter, are you going back to England, or have you only come to see someone off?"

Not even then had Coxeter—to use a phrase which he himself would not have used, for he avoided the use of slang—"given himself away." Over his lantern-shaped face, across his thin, determined mouth, there had still lingered a trace of the supercilious smile with which he had

been looking round him. And, as he had helped Mrs. Archdale into the compartment, as he indicated to her the comfortable seat he had reserved for himself, not even she—noted though she was for her powers of sympathy and understanding—had divined the delicious tremor, the curious state of mingled joy and discomfort into which her sudden presence had thrown the man whom she had greeted a little doubtfully, by no means sure that he would welcome her companionship on a long journey.

And, indeed, in spite of the effect she produced upon him, in spite of the fact that she was the only human being who had ever had, or was ever likely to have, the power of making him feel humble, not quite satisfied with himself—Coxeter disapproved of Mrs. Archdale. At the present moment he disapproved of her rather more than usual, for if she meant to give up that corner seat, why had she not so arranged as to sit by him? Instead, she was now talking to the French boy who occupied what should have been her seat.

But Nan Archdale, as all her friends called her, was always like that. Coxeter never saw her, never met her at the houses to which he went simply in order that he might meet her, without wondering why she wasted so much of the time she might have spent in talking to him, and above all in listening to him, in talking and listening to other people.

Four years ago, not long after their first acquaintance, he had made her an offer of marriage, impelled by something which had appeared at the time quite outside himself and his usual wise, ponderate view of life. He had been relieved, as well as keenly hurt, when she had refused him.

Everything that concerned himself appeared to John Coxeter of such moment and importance that at the time it had seemed incredible that Nan Archdale would be able to keep to herself the peculiar honour which had befallen her,—one, by the way, which Coxeter had never seriously thought of conferring on any other woman. But as time went on he became aware that she had actually kept the secret which was not hers to betray, and, emboldened by the knowledge that she alone knew of his humiliating bondship, he had again, after a certain interval, written and asked her if she would marry him. Again she had refused, in a kind, impersonal little note, and this last time she had gone so far as to declare that in this matter she really knew far better than he did himself what was good for him, and once more something deep in his heart had said "Amen."

When he thought about it, and he went on thinking about it more than was quite agreeable for his own comfort or peace of mind, Coxeter would tell himself, with what he believed to be

a vicarious pang of regret, that Mrs. Archdale had made a sad mistake as regarded her own interest. He felt sure she was not fit to live alone; he knew she ought to be surrounded by the kind of care and protection which only a husband can properly bestow on a woman. He, Coxeter, would have known how to detach her from the unsuitable people by whom she was always surrounded.

Nan Archdale, and Coxeter was much concerned that it was so, had an instinctive attraction for those poor souls who lead forlorn hopes, and of whom—they being unsuccessful in their fine endeavours—the world never hears. She also had a strange patience and tenderness for those ne'er-do-wells of whom even the kindest grow weary after a time. Nan had a mass of queer friends, old protégés for whom she worked unceasingly in a curious, detached fashion, which was quite her own, and utterly apart from any of the myriad philanthropic societies with which the world she lived in, and to which she belonged by birth, interests its prosperous and intelligent leisure.

It was characteristic that Nan's liking for John Coxeter often took the form of asking him to help these queer, unsatisfactory people. Why, even in this last week, while he had been in Paris, he had come into close relation with one of Mrs. Archdale's "odd-come-shorts." This time the man was an inventor, and of all un-

practical and useless things he had patented an appliance for saving life at sea!

Nan Archdale had given the man a note to Coxeter, and it was characteristic of the latter that, while resenting what Mrs. Archdale had done, he had been at some pains when in Paris to see the man in question. The invention—as Coxeter had of course known would be the case—was a ridiculous affair, but for Nan's sake he had agreed to submit it to the Admiralty expert whose business it is to consider and pronounce on such futile things. The queer little model which its maker believed would in time supersede the life-belts now carried on every British ship, had but one merit, it was small and portable: at the present moment it lay curled up, looking like a cross between a serpent's cast skin and a child's spent balloon, in Coxeter's portmanteau. Even while he had accepted the parcel with a coolly civil word of thanks, he had mentally composed the letter with which he would ultimately dash the poor inventor's hopes.

To-night, however, sitting opposite to her, he felt glad that he had been to see the man, and he looked forward to telling her about it. Scarcely consciously to himself, it always made Coxeter glad to feel that he had given Nan pleasure, even pleasure of which he disapproved.

And yet how widely apart were these two

people's sympathies and interests! Putting Nan aside, John Coxeter was only concerned with two things in life—his work at the Treasury and himself—and people only interested him in relation to these two major problems of existence. Nan Archdale was a citizen of the world—a free-woman of that dear kingdom of romance which still contains so many fragrant byways and sunny oases for those who have the will to find them. But for her freedom of this kingdom she would have been a very sad woman, oppressed by the griefs and sorrows of that other world to which she also belonged, for Nan's human circle was ever widening, and in her strange heart there seemed always room for those whom others rejected and despised.

She had the power no human being had ever had—that of making John Coxeter jealous. This was the harder to bear inasmuch as he was well aware that jealousy is a very ridiculous human failing, and one with which he had no sympathy or understanding when it affected—as it sometimes did—his acquaintances and colleagues. Fortunately for himself, he was not retrospectively jealous—jealous that is of the dead man of whom certain people belonging to his and to Nan's circle sometimes spoke of as "poor Jim Archdale." Coxeter knew vaguely that Archdale had been a bad lot, though never actually unkind to his wife; nay, more, during the short time their married life had lasted,

Archdale, it seemed, had to a certain extent reformed.

Although he was unconscious of it, John Coxeter was a very material human being, and this no doubt was why this woman had so compelling an attraction for him; for Nan Archdale appeared to be all spirit, and that in spite of her eager, sympathetic concern in the lives which circled about hers.

And yet? Yet there was certainly a strong, unspoken link between them, this man and woman who had so little in common the one with the other. They met often, if only because they both lived in Marylebone, that most conventional quarter of old Georgian London, she in Wimpole Street, he in a flat in Wigmore Street. She always was glad to see him, and seemed a little sorry when he left her. Coxeter was one of the rare human beings to whom Nan ever spoke of herself and of her own concerns. But, in spite of that curious kindliness, she did not do what so many people who knew John Coxeter instinctively did—ask his advice, and, what was, of course, more seldom done—take it. In fact he had sometimes angrily told himself that Nan attached no weight to his opinion, and as time had gone on he had almost given up offering her unsought advice.

John Coxeter attached great importance to health. He realised that a perfect physical

condition is a great possession, and he took considerable pains to keep himself what he called "fit." Now Mrs. Archdale was recklessly imprudent concerning her health, the health, that is, which was of so great a value to him, her friend. She took her meals at such odd times; she did not seem to mind, hardly to know, what she ate and drank!

Of the many strange things Coxeter had known her to do, by far the strangest, and one which he could scarcely think of without an inward tremor, had happened only a few months ago.

Nan had been with an ailing friend, and the ailing friend's only son, in the Highlands, and this friend, a foolish woman,—when recalling the matter Coxeter never omitted to call this lady a foolish woman—on sending her boy back to school, had given him what she had thought to be a dose of medicine out of the wrong bottle, a bottle marked "Poison." Nothing could be done, for the boy had started on his long railway journey south before the mistake had been discovered, and even Coxeter, when hearing the story told, had realised that had he been there he would have been sorry, really sorry, for the foolish mother.

But Nan's sympathy—and on this point Coxeter always dwelt with a special sense of injury—had taken a practical shape. She had poured out a similar dose from the bottle marked

"Poison" and had calmly drunk it, observing as she did so, "I don't believe it *is* poison in the real sense of the word, but at any rate we shall soon be able to find out exactly what is happening to Dick."

Nothing, or at least nothing but a bad headache, had followed, and so far had Nan been justified of her folly. But to Coxeter it was terrible to think of what might have happened, and he had not shared in any degree the mingled amusement and admiration which the story, as told afterwards by the culpable mother, had drawn forth. In fact, so deeply had he felt about it that he had not trusted himself to speak of the matter to Mrs. Archdale.

But Mrs. Archdale was not only reckless of her health; she was also reckless—perhaps uncaring would be the truer word—of something which John Coxeter supposed every nice woman to value even more than her health or appearance, that is, the curiously intangible, and yet so easily frayed, human vesture termed reputation.

To John Coxeter the women of his own class, if worthy, that is, of consideration and respect, went clad in a delicate robe of ermine, and the thought that this ermine should have even a shade cast on its fairness was most repugnant to him. Now Nan Archdale was not as careful in this matter of keep-

ing her ermine unspoiled and delicately white as she ought to have been, and this was the stranger inasmuch as even Coxeter realised that there was about his friend a Una-like quality which made her unafraid, because unsuspecting, of evil.

Another of the cardinal points of Coxeter's carefully thought-out philosophy of life was that in this world no woman can touch pitch without being defiled. And yet on one occasion, at least, the woman who now sat opposite to him had proved the falsity of this view. Nan Archdale, apparently indifferent to the opinion of those who wished her well, had allowed herself to be closely associated with one of those unfortunate members of her own sex who, at certain intervals in the history of the civilised world, become heroines of a drama of which each act takes place in the Law Courts. Of these dramas every whispered word, every piece of "business"—to pursue the analogy to its logical end—is overheard and visualised not by thousands but by millions,—in fact by all those of an age to read a newspaper.

Had the woman in the case been Mrs. Archdale's sister, Coxeter with a groan would have admitted that she owed her a duty, though a duty which he would fain have had her shirk or rather delegate to another. But this woman was no sister, not even a friend, simply an old

acquaintance known to Nan, 'tis true, over many years. Nan had done what she had done, had taken her in and sheltered her, going to the Court with her every day, simply because there seemed absolutely no one else willing to do it.

When he had first heard of what Mrs. Archdale was undertaking to do, Coxeter had been so dismayed that he had felt called upon to expostulate with her.

Very few words had passed between them. "Is it possible," he had asked, "that you think her innocent? That you believe her own story?"

To this Mrs. Archdale had answered with some distress, "I don't know, I haven't thought about it—— As she says she is—I hope she is. If she's not, I'd rather not know it."

It had been a confused utterance, and somehow she had made him feel sorry that he had said anything. Afterwards, to his surprise and unwilling relief, he discovered that Mrs. Archdale had not suffered in reputation as he had expected her to do. But it made him feel, more than ever, that she needed a strong, wise man to take care of her, and to keep her out of the mischief into which her unfortunate good nature —that was the way Coxeter phrased it to himself —was so apt to lead her.

It was just after this incident that he had again asked her to marry him, and that she had again

refused him. But it was since then that he had become really her friend.

At last Mrs. Archdale turned away, or else the French boy had come to an end of his eloquence. Perhaps she would now lean a little forward and speak to him—the friend whom she had not seen for some weeks and whom she had seemed so sincerely glad to see half an hour ago? But no; she remained silent, her face full of thought.

Coxeter leant back; as a rule he never read in a train, for he was aware that it is injurious to the eyesight to do so. But to-night he suddenly told himself that after all he might just as well look at the English paper he had bought at the station. He might at least see what sort of crossing they were going to have to-night. Not that he minded for himself. He was a good sailor and always stayed on deck whatever the weather, but he hoped it would be smooth for Mrs. Archdale's sake. It was so unpleasant for a lady to have a rough passage.

Again, before opening the paper, he glanced across at her. She did not look strong; that air of delicacy, combined as it was with perfect health—for Mrs. Archdale was never ill—was one of the things that made her attractive to John Coxeter. When he was with a woman, he liked to feel that he was taking care of her, and that she was more or less dependent on his good

offices. Somehow or other he always felt this concerning Nan Archdale, and that even when she was doing something of which he disapproved and which he would fain have prevented her doing.

Coxeter turned round so that the light should fall on the page at which he had opened his newspaper, which, it need hardly be said, was the *Morning Post*. Presently there came to him the murmuring of two voices, Mrs. Archdale's clear, low utterances, and another's, guttural and full.

Ah! then he had been right; the fellow sitting there, on Nan's other side, was a Jew: probably something financial, connected with the Stock Exchange. Coxeter of the Treasury looked at the man he took to be a financier with considerable contempt. Coxeter prided himself on his knowledge of human beings,—or rather of men, for even his self-satisfaction did not go so far as to make him suppose that he entirely understood women; there had been a time when he had thought so, but that was a long while ago.

He began reading his newspaper. There was a most interesting article on education. After having glanced at this, he studied more carefully various little items of social news which reminded him that he had been away from London for some weeks. Then, as he read on, the conversation between Nan Archdale and the man next to her became more audible to him. All the other people in the carriage were French, and so

first one and then the other window had been closed.

His ears had grown accustomed to the muffled, thundering sounds caused by the train, and gradually he became aware that Nan Archdale was receiving some singular confidences from the man with whom she was now speaking. The fellow was actually unrolling before her the whole of his not very interesting life, and by degrees Coxeter began rather to overhear than to listen consciously to what was being said.

The Jew, though English by birth, now lived in France. As a young man he had failed in business in London, and then he had made a fresh start abroad, apparently impelled thereto by his great affection for his mother. The Jewish race, so Coxeter reminded himself, are admirable in every relation of private life, and it was apparently in order that his mother might not have to alter her style of living that the person on whom Mrs. Archdale was now fixing her attention had finally accepted a post in a Paris house of business—no, not financial, something connected with the sweetmeat trade.

Coxeter gathered that the speaker had at last saved enough money to make a start for himself, and that now he was very prosperous. He spoke of what he had done with legitimate pride, and when describing the struggle he had gone through, the fellow used a very odd expression, "It wasn't all jam!" he said. Now he was in

a big way of business, going over to London every three months, partly in connection with his work, partly to see his old mother.

Behind his newspaper Coxeter told himself that it was amazing any human being should tell so much of his private concerns to a stranger. Even more amazing was it that a refined, rather peculiar, woman like Nan Archdale should care to listen to such a commonplace story. But listening she was, saying a word here and there, asking, too, very quaint, practical questions concerning the sweetmeat trade. Why, even Coxeter became interested in spite of himself, for the Jew was an intelligent man, and as he talked on Coxeter learned with surprise that there is a romantic and exciting side even to making sweets.

"What a pity it is," he heard Nan say at last in her low, even voice, "that you can't now come back to England and settle down there. Surely it would make your mother much happier, and you don't seem to like Paris so very much?"

"That is true," said the man, "but—well, unluckily there's an obstacle to my doing that——"

Coxeter looked up from his paper. The stranger's face had become troubled, pre-occupied, and his eyes were fixed, or so Coxeter fancied them to be, on Nan Archdale's left hand, the slender bare hand on which the only ring was her wedding ring.

Coxeter once more returned to his paper, but

for some minutes he made no attempt to follow the dancing lines of print.

"I trust you won't be offended if I ask whether you are, or are not, a married lady?" The sweetmeat man's voice had a curious note of shamed interrogation threading itself through the words.

Coxeter felt surprised and rather shocked. This was what came of allowing oneself to become familiar with an underbred stranger! But Nan had apparently not so taken the impertinent question, for, "I am a widow," Coxeter heard her answer gently, in a voice that had no touch of offence in it.

And then, after a few moments, staring with frowning eyes at the spread-out sheet of newspaper before him, Coxeter, with increasing distaste and revolt, became aware that Mrs. Archdale was now receiving very untoward confidences—confidences which Coxeter had always imagined were never made save under the unspoken seal of secrecy by one man to another. This objectionable stranger was telling Nan Archdale the story of the woman who had seen him off at the station, and whose absurd phrase, "*Adieu, mon petit homme adoré*," had rung so unpleasantly in his, Coxeter's, ears.

The eavesdropper was well aware that such stories are among the everyday occurrences of life, but his knowledge was largely theoretical; John Coxeter was not the sort of man to whom

other men are willing to confide their shames, sorrows, or even successes in a field of which the aftermath is generally bitter.

In as far as such a tale can be told with decent ambiguity it was so told by this man of whose refinement Coxeter had formed so poor an opinion, but still the fact that he was telling it remained—and it was a fact which to such a man as Coxeter constituted an outrage on the decencies of life.

Mrs. Archdale, by her foolish good nature, had placed herself in such a position as to be consulted in a case of conscience concerning a Jewish tradesman and his light o' love, and now the man was debating with her as with himself, as to whether he should marry this woman, as to whether he should force on his respectable English mother a French daughter-in-law of unmentionable antecedents! Coxeter gathered that the liaison had lasted ten years—that it had begun, in fact, very soon after the man had first come to Paris.

In addition to his feeling of wrath that Nan Archdale should become cognisant of so sordid a tale, there was associated a feeling of shame that he, Coxeter, had overheard what it had not been meant that he should hear.

Perforce the story went on to its melancholy and inconclusive end, and then, suddenly, Coxeter became possessed with a desire to see Nan Archdale's face. He glanced across at her. To his

surprise her face was expressionless; but her left hand was no longer lying on her knee, it was supporting her chin, and she was looking straight before her.

"I suppose," she said at last, "that you have made a proper provision for your—your friend? I mean in case of your death. I hope you have so arranged matters that if anything should happen to you, this poor woman who loves you would not have to go back to the kind of life from which you took her." Even Coxeter divined that Nan had not found it easy to say this thing.

"Why, no, I haven't done anything of that sort. I never thought of doing it; she's always been the delicate party. I am as strong as a horse!"

"Still—still, life's very uncertain." Mrs. Archdale was now looking straight into the face of the stranger on whom she was thrusting unsought advice.

"She has no claim on me, none at all——" the man spoke defensively. "I don't think she'd expect anything of that sort. She's had a very good time with me. After all, I haven't treated her badly."

"I'm sure you haven't," Nan spoke very gently. "I am sure you have been always kind to her. But, if I may use the simile you used just now, life, even to the happiest, the most sheltered, of women, isn't all jam!"

The man looked at her with a doubting, shame-faced glance. "I expect you're right," he said abruptly. "I ought to have thought of it. I'll make my will when I'm in England this time—I ought to have done so before."

Suddenly Coxeter leant forward. He felt the time had come when he really must put an end to this most unseemly conversation.

"Mrs. Archdale?" he spoke loudly, insistently. She looked up, startled at the sharpness of the tone, and the man next her, whose eyes had been fixed on her face with so moved and doubting a look, sat back. "I want to tell you that I've seen your inventor, and that I've promised to put his invention before the right quarter at the Admiralty."

In a moment Nan was all eagerness. "It really is a very wonderful thing," she said; "I'm so grateful, Mr. Coxeter. Did you go and see it tried? *I* did, last time I was in Paris; the man took me to a swimming-bath on the Seine—such an odd place—and there he tested it before me. I was really very much impressed. I do hope you will say a word for it. I am sure they would value your opinion."

Coxeter looked at her rather grimly. "No, I didn't see it tested." To think that she should have wasted even an hour of her time in such a foolish manner, and in such a queer place, too! "I didn't see the use of doing so, though of course the man was very anxious I should.

I'm afraid the thing's no good. How could it be?" He smiled superciliously, and he saw her redden.

"How unfair that is!" she exclaimed. "How can you possibly tell whether it's no good if you haven't seen it tried? Now I *have* seen the thing tried."

There was such a tone of protest in her voice that Coxeter felt called upon to defend himself. "I daresay the thing's all right in theory," he said quickly, "and I believe what he says about the ordinary life-belts; it's quite true, I mean, that they drown more people than they save: but that's only because people don't know how to put them on. This thing's a toy—not practical at all." He spoke more irritably than he generally allowed himself to speak, for he could see that the Jew was listening to all that they were saying.

All at once, Mrs. Archdale actually included the sweetmeat stranger in their conversation, and Coxeter at last found himself at her request most unwillingly taking the absurd model out of his bag. "Of course you've got to imagine this in a rough sea," he said sulkily, playing the devil's advocate, "and not in a fresh water river bath."

"Well, *I* wouldn't mind trying it in a rough sea, Mr. Coxeter." Nan smiled as she spoke.

Coxeter wondered if she was really serious.

Sometimes he suspected that Mrs. Archdale was making fun of him—but that surely was impossible.

II

When at last they reached Boulogne and went on board the packet, Coxeter's ill-humour vanished. It was cold, raw, and foggy, and most of their fellow-passengers at once hurried below, but Mrs. Archdale decided to stay on the upper deck. This pleased her companion; now at last he would have her to himself.

In his precise and formal way he went to a good deal of trouble to make Nan comfortable; and she, so accustomed to take thought for others, stood aside and watched him find a sheltered corner, secure with some difficulty a deck chair, and then defend it with grim determination against two or three people who tried to lay hands upon it.

At last he beckoned to her to sit down. "Where's your rug?" he asked. She answered meekly, "I haven't brought one."

He put his own rug—large, light, warm, the best money could buy—round her knees; and in the pleasure it gave him to wait on her thus he did not utter aloud the reproof which had been on his lips. But she saw him shake his head over a more unaccountable omission—

on the journey she had somehow lost her gloves. He took his own off, and with a touch of masterfulness made her put them on, himself fastening the big bone buttons over each of her small, childish wrists; but his manner while he did all these things—he would have scorned himself had it been otherwise—was impersonal, businesslike.

There are men whose every gesture in connection with a woman becomes an instinctive caress. Such men, as every woman learns in time, are not good "stayers," but they make the time go by very quickly—sometimes.

With Coxeter every minute lasted sixty seconds. But Nan Archdale found herself looking at him with unwonted kindliness. At last she said, a little tremulously, and with a wondering tone in her voice, "You're very kind to me, Mr. Coxeter." Those who spend their lives in speeding others on their way are generally allowed to trudge along alone; so at least this woman had found it to be. Coxeter made no answer to her words—perhaps he did not hear them.

Even in the few minutes which had elapsed since they came on board, the fog had deepened. The shadowy figures moving about the deck only took substance when they stepped into the circle of brightness cast by a swinging globe of light which hung just above Nan Archdale's head. Coxeter moved forward and

took up his place in front of the deck-chair, protecting its occupant from the jostling of the crowd, for the sheltered place he had found stood but a little way back from the passage between the land gangway and the iron staircase leading to the lower deck.

There were more passengers that night than usual. They passed, a seemingly endless procession, moving slowly out of the darkness into the circle of light and then again into the white, engulfing mist.

At last the deck became clear of moving figures; the cold, raw fog had driven almost everyone below. But Coxeter felt curiously content, rather absurdly happy. This was to him a great adventure. . . .

He took out his watch. If the boat started to time they would be off in another five minutes. He told himself that this was turning out a very pleasant journey; as a rule when crossing the Channel one meets tiresome people one knows, and they insist on talking to one. And then, just as he was thinking this, there suddenly surged forward out of the foggy mist two people, a newly married couple named Rendel, with whom both he and Mrs. Archdale were acquainted, at whose wedding indeed they had both been present some six or seven weeks ago. So absorbed in earnest talk with one another were the bride and bridegroom that they did not seem to see

where they were going; but when close to Mrs. Archdale they stopped short, and turned towards one another, still talking so eagerly as to be quite oblivious of possible eavesdroppers.

John Coxeter, standing back in the shadow, felt a sudden gust of envious pain. They were evidently on their way home from their honeymoon, these happy young people, blessed with good looks, money, health, and love; their marriage had been the outcome of quite a pretty romance.

But stay—what was this they were saying? Both he and Nan unwillingly heard the quick interchange of words, the wife's shrill, angry utterances, the husband's good-humoured expostulations. "I won't stay on the boat, Bob. I don't see why we should risk our lives in order that you may be back in town to-morrow. I know it's not safe—my great-uncle, the Admiral, always said that the worst storm at sea was not as bad as quite a small fog!" Then the gruff answer: "My dear child, don't be a fool! The boat wouldn't start if there was the slightest danger. You heard what that man told us. The fog was much worse this morning, and the boat was only an hour late!" "Well, you can do as you like, but *I* won't cross to-night. Where's the use of taking any risk? Mother's uncle, the Admiral ——" and Coxeter heard with shocked approval

the man's "Damn your great-uncle, the Admiral!"

There they stood, not more than three yards off, the pretty, angry little spitfire looking up at her indignant, helpless husband. Coxeter, if disgusted, was amused; there was also the comfort of knowing that they would certainly pretend not to see him, even if by chance they recognised him, intent as they were on their absurd difference.

"I shall go back and spend the night at the station hotel. No, you needn't trouble to find Stockton for me—there's no time." Coxeter and Nan heard the laughing gibe, "Then you don't mind your poor maid being drowned as well as your poor husband," but the bride went on as if he hadn't spoken—"I've quite enough money with me; you needn't give me anything—*good-bye.*"

She disappeared into the fog in the direction of the gangway, and Coxeter moved hastily to one side. He wished to save Bob Rendel the annoyance of recognising him; but then, with amazing suddenness, something happened which made Coxeter realise that after all women were even more inexplicable, unreasonable beings than even he had always known them to be.

There came the quick patter of feet over the damp deck, and Mrs. Rendel was back again, close to where her husband was standing.

"I've made up my mind to stay on the boat," she said quietly. "I think you are very unwise, as well as very obstinate, to cross in this fog; but if you won't give way, then I'd rather be with you, and share the danger."

Bob Rendel laughed, not very kindly, and together they went across to the stair leading below.

Coxeter opened his mouth to speak, then he closed it again. What a scene! What a commentary on married life! And these two people were supposed to be "in love" with one another.

The little episode had shocked him, jarred his contentment. "If you don't mind, I'll go and smoke a pipe," he said stiffly.

Mrs. Archdale looked up. "Oh yes, please do," and yet she felt suddenly bereft of something warm, enveloping, kindly. The words formed themselves on her lips, "Don't go too far away," but she did not speak them aloud. But, as if in answer to her unspoken request, Coxeter called out, "I'm just here, close by, if you want anything," and the commonplace words gave her a curious feeling of security,—a feeling, though she herself was unaware of it, which her own care and tenderness for others often afforded to those round whom she threw the sheltering mantle of her kindness.

Perhaps because he was so near, John Coxeter remained in her thoughts. Almost alone of those

human beings with whom life brought her in contact, he made no demand on her sympathy, and very little on her time. In fact, his first offer of marriage had taken her so much by surprise as to strike her as slightly absurd; she had also felt it, at the time, to be an offence, for she had given him no right to encroach on the inner shrine of her being.

Trying to account for what he had done, she had supposed that John Coxeter, being a man who evidently ordered his life according to some kind of system, had believed himself ripe for the honourable estate of marriage, and had chosen her as being "suitable."

When writing her cold letter of refusal, she had expected to hear within a few weeks of his engagement to some "nice" girl. But time had gone by and nothing of the sort had happened. Coxeter's second offer, conveyed, as had been the first, in a formal letter, had found her in a very different mood, for it had followed very closely on that done by her of which he, John Coxeter, had so greatly disapproved. She had been touched this second time and not at all offended, and gradually they had become friends. It was after his second offer that Nan began making use of him, not so much for herself as on behalf of other people.

Nan Archdale led her life without reference to what those about her considered appropriate or desirable; and years had gone by since the

boldest busybody among them would have ventured a word of rebuke. Her social background was composed of happy, prosperous people. They had but little to do with her, however, save when by some amazing mischance things went wrong with them; when all went well they were apt to forget Nan Archdale. But John Coxeter, though essentially one of them by birth and instinct, and though it had been through them that she had first met him, never forgot her.

Yet though they had become, in a sense, intimate, he made on her none of those demands which endear a man to a woman. Living up on a pleasant tableland of self-approval, he never touched the heights or depths which go to form the relief map of most human beings' lives. He always did his duty and generally enjoyed doing it, and he had no patience, only contempt, for those who shirked theirs.

The passion of love, that greatest of the Protean riddles set by nature to civilised man and woman, played no part, or so Nan Archdale believed, in John Coxeter's life. At the time she had received the letter in which he had first asked her to marry him, there had come to her, seen through the softening mists of time, a sharp, poignant remembrance of Jim Archdale's offer, "If you won't have me, Nan, I'll do something desperate! You'll be sorry then!" So poor Jim Archdale had conquered her; and looking back, when she recalled their brief married life,

she forgot the selfishness and remembered only the love, the love which had made Jim so dependent on her presence and her sympathy.

But if John Coxeter were incapable of love, she now knew him to be a good friend, and it was the friend—so she believed, and was grateful to him for it,—who had asked her to accept what he had quixotically supposed would be the shelter of his name when she had done that thing of which he had disapproved.

To-night Nan could not help wondering if he would ever again ask her to marry him. She thought not—she hoped not. She told herself quite seriously that he was one of those men who are far happier unwedded. His standard, not so much of feminine virtue as of feminine behaviour, was too high. Take what had happened just now; she had listened indulgently, tenderly, to the quarrel of the newly married couple, but she had seen the effect it had produced on John Coxeter. To him it had been a tragedy, and an ugly, ignoble tragedy to boot.

The deck was now clear of passengers. Out in the open sea the fog had become so thick as to be impenetrable, and the boat seemed to be groping its way, heralded by the mournful screaming of the siren. Mrs. Archdale felt drowsy; she leant back and closed her eyes.

Coxeter was close by, puffing steadily at his pipe. She felt a pleasant sensation of security.

She was roused, rather startled, by a man bending over her, while a voice said gruffly, "I think, ma'am, that you'd better get into shelter. The deck saloon is close by. Allow me to lead you to it."

Nan rose obediently. With the petty officer on one side and Coxeter on the other, she made a slow progress across the deck, and so to the large, brilliantly lighted saloon. There the fog had been successfully shut out, and some fifteen to twenty people sat on the velvet benches; among them was the sweetmeat merchant to whom Nan had talked in the train.

Coxeter found a comfortable place for Nan rather apart from the others, and sitting down he began to talk to her. The fog-horn, which was trumpeting more loudly, more insistently than ever, did not, he thought, interfere with their conversation as much as it might have done.

"We shan't be there till morning," Coxeter heard a man say, "till morning doth appear, at this rate!"

"I suppose we're all right. There's no *real* danger in a fog—not in the Channel; there never has been an accident on the Channel passage—not an accident of any serious kind."

"Yes, there was—to one of the Dieppe boats—a very bad accident!"

And then several of those present joined in the discussion. The man who had recalled the Dieppe boat accident could be heard, self-assertive, pragmatical, his voice raised above the voices around him. "I've been all over the world in my time, and when I'm caught in a fog at sea I always get up, dress, and go up on deck, however sleepy I may be."

Coxeter, sitting apart by Nan's side, listened with some amusement. His rather thin sense of humour was roused by the fact that the people around him were talking in so absurd a manner. This delay was not pleasant; it might even mean that he would be a few hours late at the Treasury, a thing he had never once been after a holiday, for Coxeter prided himself on his punctuality in the little as well as the great things of life. But, of course, all traffic in the Channel would be delayed by this fog, and his absence would be accounted for by the fact.

Sitting there, close to Mrs. Archdale, with no one sufficiently near to attract her attention, or, what was more likely, to appeal to her for sympathy, he felt he could well afford to wait till the fog cleared off. As for the loud, insistent screaming of the siren, that sound which apparently got on the nerves of most of those present in the deck saloon, of course it was a disagreeable noise,

but then they all knew it was a necessary precaution, so why make a fuss about it?

Coxeter turned and looked at his companion, and as he looked at her he felt a little possessive thrill of pride. Mrs. Archdale alone among the people there seemed content and at ease, indeed, she was now smiling, smiling very brightly and sweetly, and, following the direction of her eyes, he saw that they rested on a child lying asleep in its mother's arms. . . .

Perhaps after all it was a good thing that Nan was so detached from material things. Before that burst of foolish talk provoked by the fog, he had been speaking to her about a matter very interesting to himself—something connected with his work, something, by the way, of which he would not have thought of speaking to any other woman; but then Mrs. Archdale, as Coxeter had good reason to know, was exceptionally discreet. . . . She had evidently been very much interested in all he had told her, and he had enjoyed the conversation.

Coxeter became dimly conscious of what it would mean to him to have Nan to come back to when work, and the couple of hours he usually spent at his club, were over. Perhaps if Nan were waiting for him, he would not wish to stay as long as two hours at his club. But then, of course, he would want Nan all to himself. Jealous? Certainly not. He was far too sensible a man to feel jealous, but he would expect his

wife to put him first—a very long way in front of anybody else. It might be old-fashioned, but he was that sort of man.

Coxeter's thoughts leapt back into the present with disagreeable abruptness. Their Jewish fellow-traveller, the man who had thrust on Mrs. Archdale such unseemly confidences, had got up. He was now heading straight for the place where Mrs. Archdale was sitting.

Coxeter quickly decided that the fellow must not be allowed to bore Mrs. Archdale. She was in his, Coxeter's, care to-night, and he alone had a right to her interest and attention. So he got up and walked down the saloon. To his surprise the other, on seeing him come near, stopped dead. "I want to speak to you," he said in a low voice, "Mr.—er —Coxeter."

Coxeter looked at him, surprised, then reminded himself that his full name, "John Coxeter," was painted on his portmanteau. Also that Mrs. Archdale had called him "Mr. Coxeter" at least once, when discussing that life-saving toy. Still, sharp, observant fellows, Jews! One should always be on one's guard with them. "Yes?" he said interrogatively.

"Well, Mr. Coxeter, I want to ask you to do me a little favour. The truth is I've just

made my will—only a few lines—and I want you to be my second witness. I've no objection, none in the world, to your seeing what I want you to witness."

He spoke very deliberately, as if he had prepared the form of words in which he made his strange request, and as he spoke he held out a sheet of paper apparently torn out of a note-book. "I asked that gentleman over there"—he jerked his thumb over his shoulder—"to be my first witness, and he kindly consented. I'd be much obliged if you'd sign your name just here. I'll also ask you to take charge of it—only a small envelope, as you see. It's addressed to my mother. I've made her executor and residuary legatee."

Coxeter felt a strong impulse to refuse. He never mixed himself up with other people's affairs; he always refused to do so on principle.

The man standing opposite to him divined what was passing through his mind, and broke in, "Only just while we're on this boat. You can tear it up and chuck the pieces away once we're on land again—" he spoke nervously, and with contemptuous amazement Coxeter told himself that the fellow was *afraid*. "Surely you don't think there's any danger?" he asked. "D'you mean you've made this will because you think something may happen to the boat?"

The other nodded, "Accidents do happen"; he smiled rather foolishly as he said the words, pronouncing the last one, as Coxeter noted with disapproval, "habben." He was holding out a fountain pen; he had an ingratiating manner, and Coxeter, to his own surprise, suddenly gave way.

"All right," he said, and taking the paper in his hand, he glanced over it. He had no desire to pry into any man's private affairs, but he wasn't going to sign anything without first reading it.

This odd little will consisted of only two sentences, written in a clear, clerkly hand. The first bequeathed an annuity of £240 (six thousand francs) to Léonie Lenoir, of Rue Lafayette, Paris; the second appointed the testator's mother, Mrs. Solomon Munich, of Scott Terrace, Maida Vale, residuary legatee and executor. The will was signed "Victor Munich."

"Very well, I'll sign it," said Coxeter, at last, "and I'll take charge of it till we're on land. But look here—I won't keep it a moment longer!" Then, perhaps a little ashamed of his ungraciousness, "I say, Mr. Munich, if I were you I'd go below and take a stiffish glass of brandy and water. I once had a fright; I was nearly run over by a brewer's dray at Charing Cross, and I did that—took some brandy, I mean—" he jerked the words

out, conscious that the other's sallow face had reddened.

Then he signed his name at the bottom of the sheet of paper, and busied himself with putting the envelope carefully into his pocket-book. "There," he said, with the slight supercilious smile which was his most marked physical peculiarity, but of which he was quite unconscious, "your will is quite safe now! If we meet at Folkestone I'll hand it you back; if we miss one another in the—er—fog I'll destroy it, as arranged."

He turned and began walking back to where Nan Archdale was sitting. What a very odd thing! How extraordinary, how unexpected!

Then a light broke in on him. Why, of course, it was Nan who had brought this about! She had touched up the Jew fellow's conscience, frightened him about that woman—the woman who had so absurdly termed him her "*petit homme adoré.*" That's what came of mixing up in other people's business; but Coxeter's eyes nevertheless rested on the sitting figure of his friend with a certain curious indulgence. Odd, sentimental, sensitive creatures—women! But brave—not lacking in moral courage, anyway.

As he came close up to her, Mrs. Archdale moved a little, making room for him to sit down by her. It was a graceful, welcoming gesture, and John Coxeter's pulse began to quicken. . . .

He told himself that this also was an extraordinary thing—this journey with the woman he had wished to make his wife. He felt her to be so tantalisingly near, and yet in a sense so very far away.

His eyes fell on her right hand, still encased in his large brown glove. As he had buttoned that glove, he had touched her soft wrist, and a wild impulse had come to him to bend yet a little closer and press his lips to the white triangle of yielding flesh. Of course he had resisted the temptation, reminding himself sternly that it was a caddish thing even to have thought of taking advantage of Nan's confiding friendliness. Yet now he wondered whether he had been a fool not to do it. Other men did those things.

There came a dragging, grating sound, the boat shuddering as if in response. Coxeter had the odd sensation that he was being gently but irresistibly pushed round, and yet he sat quite still, with nothing in the saloon changed in relation to himself.

Someone near him exclaimed in a matter-of-fact voice, "We've struck; we're on a rock." Everyone stood up, and he saw an awful look of doubt, of unease, cross the faces of the men and women about him.

The fog-horn ceased trumpeting, and there rose confused sounds, loud hoarse shouts and

thin shrill cries, accompanying the dull thunder caused by the tramping of feet. Then the lights went out, all but the yellow flame of a small oil lamp which none of them had known was there.

The glass-panelled door opened widely, and a burly figure holding a torch, which flared up in the still, moist air, was outlined against the steamy waves of fog.

"Come out of here!" he cried; and then, as some people tried to push past him, "Steady, keep cool! There'll be room in the boats for every soul on board," and Coxeter, looking at the pale, glistening face, told himself that the man was lying, and that he knew he lied.

They stumbled out, one by one, and joined the great company which was now swarming over the upper deck, each man and woman forlorn and lonely as human beings must ever be when individually face to face with death.

Coxeter's right hand gripped firmly Mrs. Archdale's arm. She was pressing closely to his side, shrinking back from the rough crowd surging about them, and he was filled with a fierce protective tenderness which left no room in his mind for any thought of self. His one thought was how to preserve his companion from contact with some of those about them; wild-eyed, already distraught creatures, swayed with a terror which set them apart from the mass of quiet, apparently dazed people

who stood patiently waiting to do what they were told.

Close to Nan and Coxeter two men were talking Spanish; they were gesticulating, and seemed to be disagreeing angrily as to what course to pursue. Presently one of them suddenly produced a long knife which glittered in the torchlight; with it he made a gesture as if to show the other that he meant to cut his way through the crowd towards the spot, now railed off with rope barriers, where the boats were being got ready for the water.

With a quick movement Coxeter unbuttoned his cloak and drew Nan within its folds; putting his arms round her he held her, loosely and yet how firmly clasped to his breast. "I can't help it," he muttered apologetically. "Forgive me!" As only answer she seemed to draw yet closer to him, and then she lay, still and silent, within his sheltering arms,—and at that moment he remembered to be glad he had not kissed her wrist.

They two stood there, encompassed by a living wall, and yet how strangely alone. The fog had become less dense, or else the resin torches which flared up all about them cleared the air.

From the captain's bridge there whistled every quarter minute a high rocket, and soon from behind the wall of fog came in answer distant signals full of a mingled mockery and hope to the people waiting there.

But for John Coxeter the drama of his own soul took precedence of that going on round him. Had he been alone he would have shared to the full the awful, exasperating feeling of being trapped, of there being nothing to be done, which possessed all the thinking minds about him. But he was not alone——

Nan, lying on his breast, seemed to pour virtue into him—to make him extraordinarily alive. Never had he felt death, extinction so near, and yet there seemed to be something outside himself, a spirit informing, uplifting, and conquering the flesh.

Perceptions, sympathies, which had lain dormant during the whole of his thirty-nine years of life, now sprang into being. His imagination awoke. He saw that it was this woman, now standing, with such complete trust in the niceness of his honour, heart to heart with him, who had made the best of that at once solitary and companioned journey which we call life. He had thought her to be a fool; he now saw that, if a fool, she had been a divine fool, ever engaged while on her pilgrimage with the only things that now mattered. How great was the sum of her achievement compared with his. She had been a beacon diffusing light and warmth; he a shadow among shadows. If to-night he were engulfed in the unknown, for so death was visioned by John Coxeter, who would miss him, who would feel the poorer for his sudden obliteration?

Coxeter came back into the present; he looked round him, and for the first time he felt the disabling clutch of physical fear. The lifebelts were being given out, and there came to him a horrid vision of the people round him as they might be an hour hence, drowned, heads down, legs up, done to death by those monstrous yellow bracelets which they were now putting on with such clumsy, feverish eagerness.

He was touched on the arm, and a husky voice, with which he was by now familiar, said urgently, "Mr. Coxeter—see, I've brought your bag out of the saloon." The man whose name he knew to be Victor Munich was standing at his elbow. "Look here, don't take offence, Mr. Coxeter, I think better of the——" he hesitated—"the life-saver that you've got in this bag of yours than you do. I'm willing to give you a fancy price for it—what would you say to a thousand pounds? I daresay I shan't have occasion to use it, but of course I take that risk."

Coxeter, with a quick, unobtrusive movement, released Mrs. Archdale. He turned and stared, not pleasantly, at the man who was making him so odd an offer. Damn the fellow's impudence! "The life-saver is not for sale," he said shortly.

Nan had heard but little of the quick colloquy. She did not connect it with the fact that the strong protecting arms which had been about her were now withdrawn,—and the tears came into her eyes. She felt both in a physical and

in a spiritual sense suddenly alone. John Coxeter, the one human being who ever attempted to place himself on a more intimate, personal plane with her, happened, by a strange irony of fate, to be her companion in this awful adventure. But even he had now turned away from her. . . .

Nay, that was not quite true. He was again looking down at her, and she felt his hand groping for hers. As he found and clasped it, he made a movement as if he wished again to draw her towards him. Gently she resisted, and at once she felt that he responded to her feeling of recoil, and Nan, with a confused sense of shame and anger, was now hurt by his submission. Most men in his place would have made short work of her resistance,—would have taken her, masterfully, into the shelter of his arms.

There came a little stir among the people on the deck. Coxeter heard a voice call out in would-be-cheery tones, "Now then, ladies! Please step out—ladies and children only. Look sharp!" A sailor close by whispered gruffly to his mate, "I'll stick to her anyhow. No crowded boats for me! I expect she'll be a good hour settling—perhaps a bit longer."

As the first boat-load swung into the water, some of the people about them gave a little cheer. Coxeter thought, but he will never be quite sure, that in that cheer Nan joined. There was a delay of a minute; then again the captain's

voice rang out, this time in a sharper, more peremptory tone, "Now, ladies, look sharp! Come along, please."

Coxeter unclasped Nan's hand—he did not know how tightly he had been holding it. He loved her. God, how he loved her! And now he must send her away—away into the shrouding fog—away, just as he had found her. If what he had overheard were true, might he not be sending Nan to a worse fate than that of staying to take the risk with him?

But the very man who had spoken so doubtfully of the boats just now came forward. "You'd best hurry your lady forward, sir. There's no time to lose." There was an anxious, warning note in the rough voice.

"You must go now," said Coxeter heavily. "I shall be all right, Mrs. Archdale," for she was making no movement forward. "There'll be plenty of room for the men in the next boat. I'd walk across the deck with you, but I'm afraid they won't allow that." He spoke in his usual matter-of-fact, rather dry tone, and Nan looked up at him doubtingly. Did he really wish her to leave him?

Flickering streaks of light fell on his face. It was convulsed with feeling,—with what had become an agony of renunciation. She withdrew her eyes, feeling a shamed, exultant pang of joy. "I'll wait till there's room for you, too, Mr. Coxeter." She breathed rather than actually uttered the words aloud.

Another woman standing close by was saying the same thing to her companion, but in far more eager, more vociferous tones. "Is it likely that I should go away now and leave you, Bob? Of course not—don't be ridiculous!" But the Rendels pushed forward, and finally both found places in this, the last boat but one.

Victor Munich was still standing close to John Coxeter, and Mrs. Archdale, glancing at his sallow, terror-stricken face, felt a thrill of generous pity for the man. "Mr. Coxeter," she whispered, "do give him that life-saver! Did he not ask you for it just now? We don't want it."

Coxeter bent down and unstrapped his portmanteau. He handed to Nan the odd, toy-like thing by which he had set so little store, but which now he let go with a touch of reluctance. He saw her move close to the man whose name she did not know. "Here is the life-saver," she said kindly; "I heard you say you would like it."

"But you?"—he stammered—"how about you?"

"I don't want it. I shall be all right. I shouldn't put it on in any case."

He took it then, avidly; and they saw him go forward with a quick, stealthy movement to the place where the last boat was being got ready for the water.

"There's plenty of room for you and the lady now, sir!" Coxeter hurried Nan across the deck, but suddenly they were pushed roughly back. The rope barriers had been cut, and a

hand-to-hand struggle was taking place round the boat,—an ugly scrimmage to which as little reference as possible was made at the wreck inquiry afterwards. To those who looked on it was a horrible, an unnerving sight; and this time Coxeter with sudden strength took Nan back into his arms. He felt her trembling, shuddering against him,—what she had just seen had loosed fear from its leash.

"I'm frightened," she moaned. "Oh, Mr. Coxeter, I'm so horribly frightened of those men! Are they all gone?"

"Yes," he said grimly, "most of them managed to get into the boat. Don't be frightened. I think we're safer here than we should be with those ruffians."

Another man would have found easy terms of endearment and comfort for almost any woman so thrust on his protection and care, but the very depth of Coxeter's feeling seemed to make him dumb,—that and his anguished fear lest by his fault, by his own want of quickness, she had perhaps missed her chance of being saved.

But what he was lacking another man supplied. This was the captain, and Nan, listening to the cheering, commonplace words, felt her nerve, her courage, come back.

"Stayed with your husband?" he said, coming up to them. "Quite right, mum! Don't you be frightened. Look at me and my men, we're not frightened—not a bit of it! My boat will last right enough for us to

be picked off ten times over. I tell you quite fairly and squarely, if I'd my wife aboard I'd 'a kept her with me. I'd rather be on this boat of mine than I would be out there, on the open water, in this fog." But as he walked back to the place where stood the rocket apparatus, Coxeter heard him mutter, "The brutes! Not all seconds or thirds, either. I wish I had 'em here, I'd give 'em what for!"

Later, when reading the narratives supplied by some of the passengers who perforce had remained on the doomed boat, Coxeter was surprised to learn how many thrilling experiences he had apparently missed during the long four hours which elapsed before their rescue. And yet the time of waiting and suspense probably appeared as long to him as it did to any of the fifty odd souls who stayed, all close together, on the upper deck waiting with what seemed a stolid resignation for what might next befall them.

From the captain, Coxeter, leaving Mrs. Archdale for a moment, had extracted the truth. They had drifted down the French coast. They were on a dangerous reef of rock, and the rising of the wind, the lifting of the fog, for which they all looked so eagerly, might be the signal for the breaking up of the boat. On the other hand, the boat might hold for days. It was all a chance.

Coxeter kept what he had learnt to himself,

but he was filled with a dull, aching sensation of suspense. His remorse that he had not hurried Mrs. Archdale into one of the first boats became almost intolerable. Why had he not placed her in the care even of the Jew, Victor Munich, who was actually seated in the last boat before the scramble round it had begun?

More fortunate than he, Mrs. Archdale found occupation in tending the few forlorn women who had been thrust back. He watched her moving among them with an admiration no longer unwilling; she looked bright, happy, almost gay, and the people to whom she talked, to whom she listened, caught something of her spirit. Coxeter would have liked to follow her example, but, though he saw that some of the men round him were eager to talk and to discuss the situation, his tongue refused to form words of commonplace cheer.

When with the coming of the dawn the fog lifted, Nan came up to Coxeter as he stood apart, while the other passengers were crowding round a fire which had been lit on the open deck. Together in silence they watched the rolling away of the enshrouding mist; together they caught sight of the fleet of French fishing boats from which was to come succour.

As he turned and clasped her hand, he heard her say, more to herself than to him, "I did not think we should be saved."

III

John Coxeter was standing in the library of Mrs. Archdale's home in Wimpole Street. Two nights had elapsed since their arrival in London, and now he was to see her for the first time since they had parted on the Charing Cross platform, in the presence of the crowd of people comprised of unknown sympathisers, acquaintances, and friends who had come to meet them.

He looked round him with a curious sense of unfamiliarity. The colouring of the room was grey and white, with touches of deep-toned mahogany. It was Nan's favourite sitting-room, though it still looked what it had been ever since Nan could remember it—a man's room. In his day her father had been a collector of books, medals, and engravings connected with the severer type of eighteenth-century art and letters.

In a sense this room always pleased Coxeter's fancy, partly because it implied a great many things that money and even modern culture cannot buy. But now, this morning—for it was still early, and he was on his way to his office for the first time since what an aunt of his had called his mysterious preservation from death—he seemed to see everything in this

room in another light. Everything which had once been to him important had become, if not worthless, then unessential.

He had sometimes secretly wondered why Mrs. Archdale, possessed as she was of considerable means, had not altered the old house, had not made it pretty as her friends' houses and rooms were pretty; but to-day he no longer wondered at this. His knowledge of the fleetingness of life, and of the unimportance of all he had once thought so important, was too vividly present. . . .

She came into the room, and he saw that she was dressed in a more feminine kind of garment than that in which he generally saw her. It was white, and though girdled with a black ribbon, it made her look very young, almost girlish.

For a moment they looked at one another in constraint. Mrs. Archdale also had altered, altered far less than John Coxeter, but she was aware, as he was not aware, of the changes which long nearness to death had brought her; and for almost the first time in her life she was more absorbed in her own sensations than in those of the person with her.

Seeing John Coxeter standing there waiting for her, looking so like his old self, so absolutely unchanged, confused her and made her feel desperately shy.

She held out her hand, but Coxeter scarcely

touched it. After having held her so long in his arms, he did not care to take her hand in formal greeting. She mistook his gesture, thought that he was annoyed at having received no word from her since they had parted. The long day in between had been to Nan Archdale full of nervous horror, for relations, friends, acquaintances had come in troops to see her, and would not be denied.

Already she had received two or three angry notes from people who thought they loved her, and who were bitterly incensed that she had refused to see them when they had rushed to hear her account of an adventure which might so easily have happened to them. She made the mistake of confusing Coxeter with these selfish people.

"I am so sorry," she said in a low voice, "that when you called yesterday I was supposed to be asleep. I have been most anxious to see you"—she waited a moment and then added his name—"Mr. Coxeter. I knew that you would have the latest news, and that you would tell it me."

"There is news," he said, "of all the boats; good news—with the exception of the last boat——" His voice sounded strangely to himself.

"Oh, but that must be all right too, Mr. Coxeter! The captain said the boats might drift about for a long time."

Coxeter shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he

said. "In fact"—he waited a moment, and she came close up to him.

"Tell me," she commanded in a low voice, "tell me what you know. They say I ought to put it all out of my mind, but I can think of nothing else. Whenever I close my eyes I see the awful struggle that went on round that last boat!" She gave a quick, convulsive sob.

Coxeter was dismayed. How wildly she spoke, how unlike herself she seemed to-day—how unlike what she had been during the whole of their terrible ordeal.

Already that ordeal had become, to him, something to be treasured. There is no lack of physical courage in the breed of Englishmen to which John Coxeter belonged. Pain, entirely unassociated with shame, holds out comparatively little terror to such as he. There was something rueful in the look he gave her.

"The last boat was run down in the fog," he said briefly. "Some of the bodies have been washed up on the French coast."

She looked at him apprehensively. "Any of the people we had spoken to? Any of those who were with us in the railway carriage?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say that one of the bodies washed up is that of the person who sat next to you."

"That poor French boy?"

Coxeter shook his head. "No, no—he's all right; at least I believe he's all right. It—the body I mean—was that of your other neigh-

bour;" he added, unnecessarily, "the man who made sweets."

And then for the first time Coxeter saw Nan Archdale really moved out of herself. What he had just said had had the power to touch her, to cause her greater anguish than anything which had happened during the long hours of terror they had gone through. She turned and, moving as if blindly, pressed her hand to her face as if to shut out some terrible and pitiful sight.

"Ah!" she exclaimed in a low voice, "I shall never forgive myself over that! Do you know I had a kind of instinct that I ought to ask that man the name, the address"—her voice quivered and broke—"of his friend—of that poor young woman who saw him off at the Paris station?"

Till this moment Coxeter had not known that Nan had been aware of what had, to himself, been so odious, so ridiculous, and so grotesque a scene. But now he felt differently about this, as about everything else that touched on the quick of life. For the first time he understood, even sympathised with, Nan's concern for that majority of human beings who are born to suffering and who are bare to the storm. . . .

"Look here," he said awkwardly, "don't be unhappy. It's all right. That man spoke to me on the boat—he did what you wished, he made a will providing for that woman; I took charge of it for him. As a matter of fact I went and saw his old mother yesterday. She behaved splendidly."

"Then the life-saver was no good after all?"

"No good," he said, and he avoided looking at her. "At least so it would seem, but who can tell?"

Nan's eyes filled with tears; something beckoning, appealing seemed to pass from her to him. . . .

The door suddenly opened.

"Mrs. Eaton, ma'am. She says she only heard what happened, to-day, and she's sure you will see her."

Before Mrs. Archdale could answer, a woman had pushed her way past the maid into the room. "Nan? Poor darling! What an awful thing! I *am* glad I came so early; now you will be able to tell me all about it!"

The visitor, looking round her, saw John Coxeter, and seemed surprised. Fortunately she did not know him, and, feeling as if, had he stayed, he must have struck the woman, he escaped from the room.

As Coxeter went through the hall, filled with a perplexity and pain very alien from his positive nature, a good-looking, clean-shaven man, who gave him a quick measured glance, passed by. With him there had been no parleying at the door as in Coxeter's own case.

"Who's that?" he asked, with a scowl, of the servant.

"The doctor, sir," and he felt absurdly relieved. "We sent for him yesterday, for Mrs. Archdale seemed very bad last night." The servant dropped her voice, "It's the doctor, sir, as says Mrs. Archdale oughtn't to see visitors. You see it was in all the papers about the shipwreck, sir, and of course Mrs. Archdale's friends all come and see her to hear about it. They've never stopped. The doctor, he says that she ought to have stayed in bed and been quite quiet. But what would be the good of that, seeing she don't seem able to sleep? I suppose you've not suffered that way yourself, sir?"

The young woman was staring furtively at Coxeter, but, noting his cold manner and imperturbable face, she felt that he was indeed a disappointing hero of romance—not at all the sort of gentleman with whom one would care to be shipwrecked, if it came to a matter of choice.

"No," he said solemnly, "I can't say that I have."

He looked thoughtfully out into what had never been to him a "long unlovely street," and which just now was the only place in the world where he desired to stay. Coxeter, always so sure of himself, and of what was the best and wisest thing to do in every circumstance of life, felt for the first time unable to cope with a situation presented to his notice.

As he was hesitating, a carriage drove up, and

a footman came forward with a card, while the occupant of the carriage called out, making anxious inquiries as to Mrs. Archdale's condition, and promising to call again the same afternoon.

Coxeter suddenly told himself that it behoved him to see the doctor, and ascertain from him whether Mrs. Archdale was really ill.

He crossed the street, and began pacing up and down, and unconsciously he quickened his steps as he went over every moment of his brief interview with Nan. All that was himself—and there was a good deal more of John Coxeter than even he was at all aware of—had gone out to her in a rapture of memory and longing, but she, or so it seemed to him, had purposely made herself remote.

At last, after what seemed a very long time, the doctor came out of Mrs. Archdale's house and began walking quickly down the street.

Coxeter crossed over and touched him on the arm. "If I may," he said, "I should like a word with you. I want to ask you—I mean I trust that Mrs. Archdale is recovering from the effect of the terrible experience she went through the other night." He spoke awkwardly, stiffly. "I saw her for a few minutes just before you came, and I was sorry to find her very unlike herself."

The doctor went on walking; he looked coldly at Coxeter.

"It's a great pity that Mrs. Archdale's friends can't leave her alone! As to being unlike herself, you and I would probably be very unlike ourselves if we had gone through what this poor lady has just gone through!"

"You see, I was with her on the boat. We were not travelling together," Coxeter corrected himself hastily, "I happened to meet her merely on the journey. My name is Coxeter."

The other man's manner entirely altered. He slackened in his quick walk. "I beg your pardon," he said; "of course I had no notion who you were. She says you saved her life! That but for you she would have been in that boat—the boat that was lost."

Coxeter tried to say something in denial of this surprising statement, but the doctor hurried on, "I may tell you that I'm very worried about Mrs. Archdale—in fact seriously concerned at her condition. If you have any influence with her, I beg you to persuade her to refuse herself to the endless busybodies who want to hear her account of what happened. She won't have a trained nurse, but there ought to be someone on guard—a human watchdog warranted to snarl and bite!"

"Do you think she ought to go away from London?" asked Coxeter in a low voice.

"No, I don't think that—at least not for the present," the medical man frowned thoughtfully. "What she wants is to be taken out of herself.

If I could prescribe what I believe would be the best thing for her, I should advise that she go away to some other part of London with someone who will never speak to her of what happened, and yet who will always listen to her when she wants to talk about it—some sensible, commonplace person who could distract her mind without tiring her, and who would make her do things she has never done before. If she was an ordinary smart lady, I should prescribe philanthropy"—he made a slight grimace—"make her go and see some of my poorer patients—come into contact with a little *real* trouble. But that would be no change to Mrs. Archdale. No; what she wants is someone who will force her to be selfish—who will take her up the Monument one day, and to a music-hall the next, motor her out to Richmond Park, make her take a good long walk, and then sit by the sofa and hold her hand if she feels like crying——" He stopped, a little ashamed of his energy.

"Thank you," said Coxeter very seriously, "I'm much obliged to you for telling me this. I can see the sense of what you say."

"You know, in spite of her quiet manner, Mrs. Archdale's a nervous, sensitive woman" —the doctor was looking narrowly at Coxeter as he spoke.

"She was perfectly calm and—and very brave at the time——"

"That means nothing! Pluck's not a matter of nerve—it ought to be, but it isn't! But I admit you're a remarkable example of the presence of the one coupled with the absence of the other. You don't seem a penny the worse, and yet it must have been a very terrible experience."

"You see, it came at the end of my holiday," said Coxeter gravely, "and, as a matter of fact"—he hesitated—"I feel quite well, in fact, remarkably well. Do you see any objection to my calling again, I mean to-day, on Mrs. Archdale? I might put what you have just said before her."

"Yes, do! Do that by all means! Seeing how well you have come through it"—the doctor could not help smiling a slightly satirical smile—"ought to be a lesson to Mrs. Archdale. It ought to show her that after all she is perhaps making a great deal of fuss about nothing."

"Hardly that," said Coxeter with a frown.

They had now come to the corner of Queen Anne Street. He put out his hand hesitatingly; the doctor took it, and, oddly enough, held it for a moment while he spoke.

"Think over what I've said, Mr. Coxeter. It's a matter of hours. Mrs. Archdale ought to be taken in hand at once." Then he went off, crossing the street. "Pity the man's such a dry stick," he said to himself; "now's his chance, if he only knew it!"

John Coxeter walked straight on. He had written the day before to say that he would be at his office as usual this morning, but now the fact quite slipped his mind.

Wild thoughts were surging through his brain; they were running away with him and to such unexpected places!

The Monument? He had never thought of going up the Monument; he would formerly have thought it a sad waste of time, but now the Monument became to John Coxeter a place of pilgrimage, a spot of secret healing. A man had once told him that the best way to see the City was at night, but that if you were taking a lady you should choose a Sunday morning, and go there on the top of a 'bus. He had thought the man who said this very eccentric, but now he remembered the advice and thought it well worth following.

By the time Coxeter turned into Cavendish Square he had travelled far further than the Monument. He was in Richmond Park; Nan's hand was thrust through his arm, as it had been while they had watched the first boat fill slowly with the women and children.

To lovers who remember, the streets of a great town, far more than country roads and lanes, hold over the long years precious, poignant memories, for a background of stones and mortar has about it a character of permanence which

holds captive and echoes the scenes and words enacted and uttered there.

Coxeter has not often occasion to go the little round he went that morning, but when some accidental circumstance causes him to do so, he finds himself again in the heart of that kingdom of romance from which he was so long an alien, and of which he has now become a naturalised subject. As most of us know, many ways lead to the kingdom of romance; Coxeter found his way there by a water-way.

And so it is that when he reaches the turning into Queen Anne Street there seems to rise round him the atmosphere of what Londoners call the City—the City as it is at night, uncannily deserted save for the ghosts and lovers who haunt its solitary thoroughfares after the bustle of the day is stilled. It was then that he and Nan first learnt to wander there. From there he travels on into golden sunlight; he is again in Richmond Park as it was during the whole of that beautiful October.

Walking up the west side of Cavendish Square, Coxeter again becomes absorbed in his great adventure,—a far greater adventure than that with which his friends and acquaintances still associate his name. With some surprise, even perhaps with some discomfiture, he sees himself —for he has not wholly cast out the old Adam— he sees himself as he was that memorable morning, carried, that is, wholly out of his usual

wise, ponderate self. Perhaps he even wonders a little how he could ever have found courage to do what he did—he who has always thought so much, in a hidden way, of the world's opinion and of what people will say.

He could still tell you which lamp-post he was striding past when he realised, with a thrill of relief, that in any case Nan Archdale would not treat him as would almost certainly do one of those women whom he had honoured with his cold approval something less than a week ago. Any one of those women would have regarded what he was now going to ask Nan to do as an outrage on the conventions of life. But Nan Archdale would be guided only by what she herself thought right and seemly. . . .

And then, as he turns again into Wimpole Street, as he comes near to what was once his wife's house, his long steady stride becomes slower. Unwillingly he is living again those doubtful moments when he knocked at her door, when he gave the surprised maid the confused explanation that he had a message from the doctor for Mrs. Archdale. He hears the young woman say, "Mrs. Archdale is just going out, sir. The doctor thought she ought to take a walk;" and his muttered answer, "I won't keep her a moment. . . ."

Again he feels the exultant, breathless thrill which seized him when she slipped, neither of them exactly knew how, into his arms, and when

the sentences he had prepared, the arguments he meant to use, in his hurried rush up the long street, were all forgotten. He hears himself imploring her to come away with him now, at once. Is she not dressed to go out? Instinct teaches him for the first time to make to her the one appeal to which she ever responds. He had meant to tell her what the doctor had said—to let that explain his great temerity—but instead he tells her only that he wants her, that he cannot go on living apart from her. Is there any good reason why they should not start now, this moment, for Doctors' Commons, in order to see how soon they can be married?

So it is that when John Coxeter stands in Wimpole Street, so typical a Londoner belonging to the leisured and conventional class that none of the people passing by even glance his way, he lives again through the immortal moment when she said, "Very well."

To this day, so transforming is the miracle of love, Nan Coxeter believes that during their curious honeymoon it was she who was taking care of John, not he of her.

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